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THE

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED

BY

C. H. SPURGEON

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DURING THE YEAR 1900.

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Interior of the second Tabernacle pastored by Thomas Spurgeon.

TO

THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,

IN

THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,

BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY,

WORLD WITHOUT END,

AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER, AS THE COVENANT GOD OF ISRAEL;

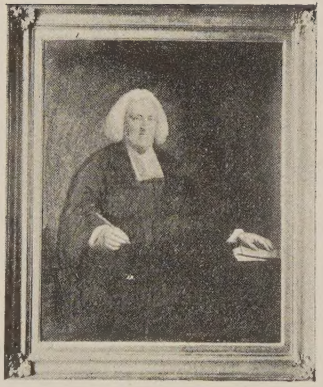
TO THE GRACIOUS SON, THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;

TO THE HOLY GHOST, THE AUTHOR OF SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF THE FREE GRACE OF GOD

HEREIN PROCLAIMED UNTO MEN.

Benjamin Keach,
1668-1704.



Dr. Gill,
1720-1771.

Dr. Rippon,
1773-1836.

The three famous ministers of the Baptist Church, Southwark, prior to Charles Haddon Spurgeon's pastorate.
These are from paintings which hung in the old Tabernacle, and escaped the fire.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE DEATH OF CHRIST FOR HIS PEOPLE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 7TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Lord's-day Evening, in the winter of 1857.

"He laid down his life for us."—1 John iii. 16.

COME, believer, and contemplate this sublime truth, thus proclaimed to thee in simple monosyllables: "He laid down his life for us." There is not one long word in the sentence; it is all as simple as it can be; and it is simple because it is sublime. Sublimity in thought always needs simplicity in words to express itself. Little thoughts require great words to explain them; little preachers need Latin words to convey their feeble ideas, but great thoughts and great expressers of those thoughts are content with little words.

"He laid down his life for us." Here there is not much upon which any man can display his eloquence; here is little room for metaphysical discussion or for deep thought; the text sets before us a simple yet sublime doctrine. What, then, shall I do with it? If I would speak of it profitably to myself, since I need not employ my wit to dissect it, nor my oratory to proclaim it, let me exercise my adoration to worship it; let me prostrate all my powers before the throne, and, like an angel when his work is done, and he has nowhere else to fly at his Lord's command, let me fold the wings of my contemplation, and stand before the throne of this great truth, and meekly bow myself, and worship him that was, and is, and is to come,—the great and glorious One who "laid down his life for us."

It will be well for me, in commencing my discourse, to remind you that there is no understanding the death of Christ unless we understand the person of Christ. If I were to tell you that God died for us, although I might be telling you a truth, and you might possibly not misunderstand what I meant, yet I should be at the same time uttering an error. God cannot die; it is, of course, impossible, from his very nature, that he could even for a moment cease to exist. God is incapable of suffering. It is true that we sometimes use words to express emotions on the part of God; but, then, we speak after the manner of men. He is impassive; he cannot suffer; it is not possible for him to endure aught; much less, then, is it

possible for him to suffer death. Yet we are told, in the verse from which our text is taken, "Hereby perceive we the love *of God*." You notice that the words "of God" are inserted by the translators. They are in italics because they are not in the original. A better translation would be, "Hereby perceive we love." But when we read "of God," it might lead the ignorant to fancy that God could die; whereas, God could not. We must always understand, and constantly remember, that our Lord Jesus Christ was "very God of very God," and that, as God, he had all the attributes of the Most High, and could not, therefore, be capable either of suffering or death. But then he was also man, "man of the substance of his mother," man, just like ourselves, sin alone excepted. And the Lord Jesus died not as God; it was as man that he gave up the ghost; as man, he was nailed to the cross. As God, he was in heaven, even when his body was in the tomb; as God, he was swaying the sceptre of all worlds even when the mock sceptre of reed was in his hand, and the imperial robe of universal monarchy was on the eternal shoulders of his Godhead when the soldier's old purple cloak was wrapped about his manhood. He did not cease to be God, he did not lose his Omnipotence, and his eternal dominion, when he became man; nor did he, as God, die or suffer; it was as man that he "laid down his life for us."

Come, now, my soul, and worship this man, this God. Come, believer, and behold thy Saviour; come to the innermost circle of all sanctity, the circle that contains the cross of Christ, and here sit down; and, whilst thou dost worship, learn three lessons from the fact that "he laid down his life for us." The first lesson should be,—Did he lay down his life for us? Ah! then, my brethren, *how great must have been our sins* that they could not have been atoned for at any other price! Secondly, did he lay down his life for us? Ah! then, beloved, *how great must have been his love!* He would not stop short anywhere, until life itself had been resigned. Thirdly, did he lay down his life for us? Ah! then, my soul, be of good cheer; *how safe art thou!* If such an atonement hath been offered, if such a sure satisfaction hath been given to Almighty God, how secure thou art! Who is he that can destroy him who hath been bought with the blood of such a Redeemer?

I. Come, then, let me believingly meditate on the first sad fact. Did Christ lay down his life for me? Then, HOW GREAT MUST HAVE BEEN MY SINS!

Ah! my brethren, I will speak a little of my own experience, and in so doing I shall also be describing yours. I have seen my sins in many different ways. I saw them once by the blazing light of Sinai; and, oh! my spirit shrank within me, for my sins seemed exceeding black. When the sound of the trumpet waxed loud and long, and the lightning and fire flashed into my heart, I saw a very hell of iniquity within my soul, and I was ready then to curse the day that I was born, that I should have had such a heart, so vile and so deceitful. I thought that then I had seen the exceeding blackness of my sin. Alas! I had not seen enough of sin to make me loathe it so as to leave it, for that conviction passed away. Sinai

was but a volcano, and it was hushed to silence; and then I began to play with sin again, and loved it as much as ever.

I beheld another sight one day; I saw my sins by the light of heaven. I looked up, and I considered the heavens, the work of God's fingers; I perceived the purity of God's character written on the sunbeams, I saw his holiness engraved upon the wide world, as well as revealed in Scripture; and as I compared myself with him, I thought I saw how black I was. O God! I never knew the heinousness of my own guilt, until I saw the glory of thy character; but now I see the brightness of thy holiness, my whole soul is cast down at the thought of my sinfulness, and my great departure from the living God. I thought that, then, I had seen enough. Ah! I had seen enough to make me worship for a moment; but my gladness was as the early cloud and as the morning dew, and I went my way, and forgot what manner of man I was. When I had lost the sense of the majesty of God, I lost also the consciousness of my own guilt.

Then there came to me another view, and I beheld God's loving-kindness to me; I saw how he had dandled me upon the knee of Providence,—how he had carried me all my life long,—how he had strewn my path with plenty, and given me all things richly to enjoy. I remembered how he had been with me in the hour of trial, how he had preserved me in the day of hurricane, and kept me safe at the moment of storm. I remembered all his goodness to me; and, struck with surprise at his mercy, I looked upon my sin in the light of his grace; and I said, "O sin, how base thou art, what dire ingratitude dost thou manifest against a God so profoundly kind!"

I thought, then, surely I had seen the worst of sin, when I had laid it side by side, first with the character of God, and afterwards with his bounties. I cursed sin from my inmost heart, and thought I had seen enough of it. But, ah! my brethren, I had not. That sense of gratitude passed away, and I found myself still prone to sin, and still loving it.

But, oh, there came a thrice-happy, yet thrice-mournful hour! One day, in my wanderings, I heard a cry, a groan; methought 'twas not a cry such as came from mortal lip, it had in it such unutterable depths of wondrous woe. I turned aside, expecting to see some great sight; and it was indeed a great sight that I saw. Lo, there, upon a tree, all bleeding, hung a man. I marked the misery that made his flesh all quiver on his bones; I beheld the dark clouds come rolling down from heaven, like the chariots of misery; I saw them clothe his brow with blackness; I saw even in the thick darkness, for mine eyes were opened, and I perceived that his heart was as full of the gloom and horror of grief as the sky was full of blackness. Then I seemed to look into his soul, and I saw there torrents of unutterable anguish,—wells of torment of such an awful character that mortal lip dare not sip, lest it should be burned with scalding heat. I said, "Who is this mighty sufferer? Why doth he suffer thus? Hath he been the greatest of all sinners, the basest of all blasphemers?" But a voice came forth from the excellent glory, and it said, "This is my beloved Son; but

he took the sinner's sin upon himself, and he must bear its penalty." O God! I thought, I never saw sin till that hour, when I saw it tear Christ's glories from his head,—when it seemed for a moment even to withdraw the lovingkindness of God from him,—when I saw him covered with his own blood, and plunged into the uttermost depths of oceans of grief. Then I said, "Now shall I know what thou art, O sin, as never before I knew it!" Though those other sights might teach me something of the dire character of evil, yet never, till I saw the Saviour on the tree, did I understand how base a traitor man's guilt was to man's God.

O heir of heaven, lift now thine eye, and behold the scenes of suffering through which thy Lord passed for thy sake! Come in the moonlight, and stand between those olives; see him sweat great drops of blood. Go from that garden, and follow him to Pilate's bar. See your Master subjected to the grossest and filthiest insult; gaze upon the face of spotless beauty defiled with the spittle of soldiers; see his head pierced with thorns; mark his back, all rent, and torn, and scarred, and bruised, and bleeding beneath the terrible lash. And O Christian, see him die! Go and stand where his mother stood, and hear him say to thee, "Man, behold thy Saviour!" Come thou to-night, and stand where John stood; hear him cry, "I thirst," and find thyself unable either to assuage his griefs or to comprehend their bitterness. Then, when thou hast wept there, lift thine hand, and cry, "Revenge!" Bring out the traitors; where are they? And when your sins are brought forth as the murderers of Christ, let no death be too painful for them; though it should involve the cutting off of right arms, or the quenching of right eyes, and putting out their light for ever; do it! For if these murderers murdered Christ, then let them die. Die terribly they may, but die they must. Oh! that God the Holy Ghost would teach you that first lesson, my brethren, the boundless wickedness of sin, for Christ had to lay down his life before your sin could be wiped away.

II. Now we will come to the second head, and here we will lift up our hearts from the depths of sadness to the heights of affection. Did the Saviour lay down his life for me? We will read it now, "He laid down his life for me;" and I pray the Lord to help each of you, by faith, to read it so, because, when we say "us", that is dealing in generalities,—blessed generalities, it is true,—but let us, at this time, deal in specialities, and say, each one of us who can do so truthfully, "He laid down his life for *me*." Then, HOW GREATLY HE MUST HAVE LOVED ME!

Ah, Lord Jesus! I never knew thy love till I understood the meaning of thy death. Beloved, we shall try again, if we can, to tell the story of our own experience, to let you see how God's love is to be learned. Come, saint, sit down, and meditate on thy creation, note how marvellously thou hast been formed, and all thy bones fitted to one another, and see love there. Mark, next, that predestination which placed thee where thou art; for the lines have fallen unto thee in pleasant places, and, notwithstanding all thy troubles, thou hast, compared with many a poor soul, "a goodly

heritage." Mark, then, the love of God displayed in the predestination that has made thee what thou art, and placed thee where thou art. Then look thou back, and see the lovingkindness of thy Lord, as displayed to thee in all thy journey up till now. Thou art getting old, and thy hair is whitening above thy brow; but he hath carried thee all the days of old; not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord thy God hath promised. Recall thy life-story. Go back now, and look at the tapestry of thy life, which God has been working every day with the golden filament of his love, and see what pictures of grace there are upon it. Canst thou not say that Jesus has loved thee? Turn thine eye back, and read the ancient rolls of the everlasting covenant, and see thy name amongst the firstborn, the elect, the Church of the living God. Say, did he not love thee when he wrote thy name there? Go and remember how the eternal settlements were made, and how God decreed and arranged all things so that thy salvation should come to pass. Say, was there not love there?

Pause at the remembrance of thy convictions; think of thy conversion; recollect thy preservation, and how God's grace hath been working upon thee, in adoption, in justification, and in every item of the new covenant; and when thou hast summed up all these things, let me ask thee this question,—Do all these things produce in thee such a sense of gratitude as the one thing that I shall mention now, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? For, my brother, if thy mind is like mine, although thou wilt think highly enough of all these things that God hath given thee, thou wilt be obliged to confess that the thought of the death of Christ upon the cross swallows them all up. This I know, my brethren, I may look back, I may look forward, but whether I look back to the decrees of eternity, or look forward to the pearl-gated city, and all the splendours that God has prepared for his own beloved children, I can never see my Father's love so beaming forth, in all its effulgence, as when I look at the cross of Christ, and see him die thereon. I can read the love of God in the rocky letters of the eternal covenant, and in the blazing letters of heaven hereafter; but, my brethren, in those crimson lines, those lines written in blood, there is something more striking than there is anywhere else, for they say, "He laid down his life for us." Ah, here it is ye learn love. You know the old story of Damon and Pythias,—how the two friends struggled together as to which should die for the other; there was love there. But, ah! there is no comparison between Damon and Pythias, and a poor sinner and his Saviour. Christ laid down his life, his glorious life, for a poor worm; he stripped himself of all his splendours, then of all his happiness, then of his own righteousness, then of his own robes, till he was naked to his own shame; and then he laid down his life, that was all he had left, for our Saviour had not kept anything back.

Just think of that for a moment. He had a crown in heaven; but he laid that aside, that you and I might wear one for ever. He had a girdle of brightness—brighter than the stars,—about his loins; but he took it off, and laid it by, that you and I might eternally

wear a girdle of righteousness. He had listened to the holy songs of the cherubim and seraphim; but he left them all that we might for ever dwell where angels sing; and then he came to earth, and he had many things, even in his poverty, which might have tended to his comfort; he laid down, first one glory, and then another, at love's demand; at last, it came to this, he had nothing left but one poor garment, woven from the top throughout, and that was clinging to his back with blood, and he laid down that also. Then there was nothing left, he had not kept back one single thing. "There," he might have said, "take an inventory of all I have, to the last farthing; I have given it all up for my people's ransom." And there was nought left now but his own life. O love insatiable! couldst thou not stay there? Though he had given up one hand to cancel sin, and the other hand to reconcile us unto God; and had given up one foot that we might have our sinful feet for ever transfixed, and nailed, and fastened, ne'er to wander, and the other foot to be fastened to the tree that we might have our feet at liberty to run the heavenly race; and there was nothing left but his poor heart, and he gave his heart up too, and they set it abroach with the spear, and forthwith there came out thence blood and water.

Ah, my Lord! what have I ever given to thee compared to what thou hast given for me? Some poor things, like some rusty farthings, I have given thee; but how little compared with what thou hast given me! Now and then, my Lord, I have given thee a poor song upon an ill-toned instrument; sometimes, my Lord, I have done some little service for thee; but, alas! my fingers were so black, they spoiled what I intended to have presented to thee white as snow. It is nought I have done for thee, my Lord. No, though I have been a missionary, and surrendered home and friends; no, though I have been a martyr, and given my body to be burned, I will say, in the last hour, "My Master, I have done nothing for thee, after all, in comparison with what thou hast done for me; and yet, what can I do more? How can I show my love to thee, for thy love to me, so peerless, so matchless? What shall I do? I will do nothing but—

> "'Dissolved by thy goodness, I'll fall to the ground,
> And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found.'

"That is all I can do, and that I must and will do."

III. Now, beloved, we will change the theme, and go one note higher. We have run up the gamut a long way, and now we have just reached the height of the octave. But we have something else to get out of the text: "He laid down his life for us." Did my Saviour lay down his life for me? Then, HOW SAFE I AM!

We will have no controversy to-night with those who do not see this truth; the Lord open their blind eyes, and show it to them! That is all we will say. We, who know the gospel, see, in the fact of the death of Christ, a reason that no strength of logic can ever shake, and no power of unbelief can remove, why we should be saved. There may be men, with minds so distorted that they can conceive it possible that Christ should die for a man who afterwards is lost;

I say, there may be such. I am sorry to say that there are still to be found some such persons, whose brains have been so addled, in their childhood, that they cannot see that what they hold is both a preposterous falsehood and a blasphemous libel. Christ dies for a man, and then God punishes that man again; Christ suffers in a sinner's stead, and then God condemns that sinner after all! Why, my friends, I feel quite shocked in only mentioning such an awful error; and were it not so current as it is, I should certainly pass it over with the contempt that it deserves. The doctrine of Holy Scripture is this, that God is just, that Christ died in the stead of his people, and that, as God is just, he will never punish one solitary soul of Adam's race for whom the Saviour did thus shed his blood. The Saviour did, indeed, in a certain sense, die for all; all men receive many a mercy through his blood, but that he was the Substitute and Surety for all men, is so inconsistent, both with reason and Scripture, that we are obliged to reject the doctrine with abhorrence. No, my soul, how shalt thou be punished if thy Lord endured thy punishment for thee? Did he die for thee? O my soul, if Jesus was not thy Substitute, and did not die in thy very stead, then he is no Saviour to thee! But if he was thy Substitute, if he suffered as thy Surety, in thy stead, then, my soul, "Who is he that condemneth?" Christ hath died, yea, rather, hath risen again, and sitteth at the right hand of God, and maketh intercession for us. There stands the master-argument: Christ "laid down his life for us," and "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." If the agonies of the Saviour put our sins away, the everlasting life of the Saviour, with the merits of his death added thereunto, must preserve his people, even unto the end.

This much I know,—ye may hear men stammer when they say it,—but what I preach is the old Lutheran, Calvinistic, Augustinian, Pauline, Christian truth,—there is not one sin in the Book of God against anyone that believeth. Our sins were numbered on the Scapegoat's head, and there is not one sin, that ever a believer did commit, that hath any power to damn him, for Christ hath taken the damning power out of sin, by allowing it, to speak by a bold metaphor, to damn himself, for sin did condemn him; and, inasmuch as sin condemned him, sin cannot condemn us. O believer, this is thy security, that all thy sin and guilt, all thy transgressions and thine iniquities, have been atoned for, and were atoned for before they were committed; so that thou mayest come with boldness, though red with all crimes, and black with every lust, and lay thine hand on that Scapegoat's head, and when thou hast put thine hand there, and seen that Scapegoat driven into the wilderness, thou mayest clap thine hands for joy, and say, "It is finished, sin is pardoned."

> "Here's pardon for transgressions past,
> It matters not how black their cast;
> And oh, my soul, with wonder view,
> For sins to come, here's pardon too!"

This is all I want to know; did the Saviour die for me? Then I

will not continue in sin that grace may abound; but nothing shall stop me of thus glorying, in all the churches of the Lord Jesus, that my sins are entirely removed from me; and, in God's sight, I may sing, as Hart did sing,—

> "With Christ's spotless vesture on,
> Holy as the Holy One."

O marvellous death of Christ, how securely dost thou set the feet of God's people on the rocks of eternal love; and how securely dost thou keep them there! Come, dear brethren, let us suck a little honey out of this honeycomb. Was there ever anything so luscious and so sweet to the believer's taste as this all-glorious truth that we are complete in him; that in and through his death and merits we are accepted in the Beloved? Oh, was there ever anything more sublime than this thought, that he hath already raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, far above all principalities and powers; just where he sits? Surely there is nothing more sublime than that, except it be that a master-thought stamps all these things with more than their own value,—that master-thought that, though the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, the covenant of his love shall never depart from us. "For," saith Jehovah, "I will never forget thee, O Zion;" "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." O Christian, that is a firm foundation, cemented with blood, on which thou mayest build for eternity! Ah, my soul! thou needest no other hope but this. Jesus, thy mercy never dies; I will plead this truth when cast down with anguish,—Thy mercy never dies. I will plead this when Satan hurls temptations at me, and when conscience casts the remembrance of my sin in my teeth; I will plead this ever, and I will plead it now,—

> "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
> My beauty are, my glorious dress."

Yea, and after I die, and even when I stand before thine eyes, thou dread Supreme,—

> "When from the dust of death I rise,
> To take my mansion in the skies,
> E'en then shall this be all my plea,
> 'Jesus hath lived and died for me.'
>
> "Bold shall I stand in that great day,
> For who aught to my charge shall lay?
> While through Christ's blood absolved I am
> From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

Ah, brethren, if this is your experience, you may come to the table of communion now right happily; it will not be coming to a funeral, but to a feast of gladness. "He laid down his life for us."

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN IX., AND 1 CORINTHIANS X. 15—33, AND XI. 1.

We will first read about one of our Lord's miracles, and then, as many of us will be coming to the communion table, we will read about the Lord's supper.

John ix. 1—3. *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents:*

That is, the sin of the man or of his parents was not the cause of his being blind.

3. *But that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*

What a very blessed way of looking at evil,—as an opportunity for God to manifest the power of his works of grace by getting rid of it! I wish that everyone here would look upon the evil within his own heart in this very hopeful light, and say, "There is something in me for God to conquer. There is some spiritual disease in me for the great Physician to heal. There is space in my poor soul for the Lord himself to work some miracle of mercy."

4—7. *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

You notice, brethren, that the disciples wanted to know how the man became blind; but Christ removed his blindness, and gave him sight. I have known a great many puzzle themselves about the origin of evil. Christ did not come to explain that mystery; he came to put an end to evil. That is an infinitely more practical object than that of speculating about how evil first entered the world, or how it entered any individual soul. He will tell you how to get rid of it.

What a blessed way of healing Christ used! He could have spoken, and the man's eyes would have opened at once. He who said, "Let there be light," and there was light, in the first creation, could have said the same thing to this blind man, and light would at once have entered his eyes. Instead of that, he chose to use means, and the means did not appear to be very likely to effect the cure. Jesus covered the man's eyes with clay, and bade him go and wash it off again. Is this the way to give him sight? Yes. Our Lord often uses means that seem to be very unlikely to accomplish his purpose, but he always uses the right means. Often, when he is going to open a man's eyes spiritually, he first makes him feel more blind than ever he was before in all his life. A sense of deeper darkness hangs over him just before the dawn of eternal day. Perhaps, even this very hour, some words of mine, human and imperfect as they must be, may, nevertheless, have the truth in them, just as the clay was made efficacious by the spittle from the Saviour's blessed mouth; and if so, there will be healing work wrought among blind hearts to-night. God grant that it may be so!

8, 9. *The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.*

There is an end of all question about the matter; he says, "I am the

very man." No one knew this better than he did, and therefore he was the one to say it.

10, 11. *Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.*

A very plain story, very well told. It is the story of every soul that gets the eternal light. "Christ told me to believe in him; I did believe in him; and I received the blessing." There are not many incidents in the narrative, and there is nothing very romantic; but it is a simple and plain declaration of what Christ had done for him; and, blessed be God, just as sight was given to the blind man, Christ still gives salvation to all who trust him.

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner,—look unto him, and be saved,—
Unto him who was nail'd to the tree.

"It is not thy tears of repentance or prayers,
But the blood that atones for the soul:
On him, then, who shed it, believing at once,
Thy weight of iniquities roll.

"But take, with rejoicing, from Jesus at once
The life everlasting he gives:
And know, with assurance, thou never canst die,
Since Jesus, thy righteousness, lives."

12—14. *Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not. They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.*

Oh, that he would do the same thing, in a spiritual sense, this Sabbath day! On another occasion, when he had wrought a miracle on the Sabbath, and the Jews therefore sought to persecute him, and slay him, he said to them, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The Sabbath day was often Christ's chief working day; may he make it to be so again now!

15—17. *Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.*

There was no mistake about that matter in the mind of the man whom he had healed; none but a prophet, mighty in word and deed, could have wrought such a miracle as that.

18—21. *But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.*

And so he did. He was one of those people who can speak for themselves; and it is greatly to be wished that many more of those who have been cured by Christ could do the same. He was a conscientious man, who,

without fear of offending or any desire to curry favour, spoke out honestly what he knew,—nothing more.

22—27. *These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?*

He was a sharp, ready-witted man, who was not to be enticed into making any rash and unguarded statements. He knew what he did know, and he kept to that; and whenever any of you are assailed by the enemies of Christ, you will do well to imitate this man, and neither be abashed by their frowns and sneers, nor yet be too ready to cast your pearls before swine.

28. *Then they reviled him,—*

That is the usual way with the men of the world; when they cannot beat a man in argument, they begin to call him bad names: "They reviled him,"—

28—31. *And said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners:*

That is to say, he does not work miracles by them; he does not hear their prayers, and give them the power to open blind men's eyes.

31—33. *But if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.*

Christ could not have given sight to the blind man if he had not himself come from God. This was good reasoning, and it would have been convincing if the objectors had been willing to be convinced by the truth.

34. *They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*

"Holy and learned people like us, Pharisees, do you set up to be our teacher?"

34—38. *And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

Then was his cure indeed complete. He had seen Christ spiritually as well as naturally, and fell at his feet, and worshipped him as the Son of God.

39—41. *And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.*

1 Cor. x. 15—19. *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being*

many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?

After they had offered the beasts as sacrifices to their idols, it was the custom to sell the carcases in the shambles. Christian men, going into the market to buy meat, and asking no questions, bought and ate portions of these sacrifices, and they did no wrong whatever. But there were some in the church who were very tender of conscience, and who said, "If we eat meat which has been offered to idols, we thereby become partakers with the idolaters." Paul therefore writes:—

20, 21. *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils:*

It cannot be; there must be a separation between these two things. We cannot have any delight in idol-worship, and yet worship the Christ of God.

21—28. *Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:*

So, you see, you may eat the meat if you like, for the idol is nothing at all; but, still, if you are told that it is meat that has been offered to idols, and that you by eating of it seem to join in the worship of idols, abstain from doing it, not for your own sake, but for the sake of the man who might be caused to stumble through you. This is a safe rule with regard to Christian behaviour in many other things. There may be things lawful in drink as well as in meat, which a man may take without sinning; but if he knows that his example leads others astray, then let him take heed that he does not set such an example. An example which is an excuse for drunkenness is not a good one; therefore, let none of us set it before the eyes of men. If any man say to you, "This meat has been offered in sacrifice to idols," "eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

29. *Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?*

That man may not be able to do it without injury to himself, but I may, and I have liberty so to do; but yet, as a Christian man, I am to consider his want of power, and I am not to use my liberty lest I do harm to my brother.

30, 31. *For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

And if anything you might do would not glorify God, do not do it.

32, 33. *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*

Chapter xi. Verse 1. *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ALL THE PROMISES.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 14TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, August 31st, 1882.

"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."—2 Cor. i. 20.

As the result of a very simple incident, a sublime truth may be proclaimed. It was so in the instance referred to in this chapter. These Corinthians had misrepresented the apostle Paul, and spoken ill of him. He might have ignored their unkindness, and said nothing about it; but, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was led to act otherwise; and, while defending his own character for consistency, to vindicate also the consistency and truthfulness of God. We might never have had this precious verse if Paul had not been so ill-treated by these men of Corinth. They did him great wrong, and caused him much sorrow of heart, for a man who was so sincere and upright could not but be sorely vexed by their unjust suspicions and misrepresentations; yet you see how the evil was overruled by God for good, and through their unsavoury gossip and slander this sweet sentence was pressed out of Paul: "For all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in Christ Amen, unto the glory of God by us." There are many things which, at first, we may regret, but for which we are afterwards exceedingly grateful. I have felt half inclined to thank the Pharisees and scribes for some of their cruel attacks upon our blessed Lord himself, for, in answering them, he has given us lessons which we now highly prize. Perhaps we might never have had those three wonderful parables of the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost son, if those cavillers had not spoken evil of him because all the publicans and sinners drew near unto him to hear him.

The fact was, that Paul had intended to visit the Christians at Corinth again, but he felt compelled to alter his decision, and he did not go to them, because he could only have gone in order to chastise

or rebuke them, they had behaved so ill. In their folly, and in their coolness towards the apostle, they misconstrued his action, and they said, "We cannot rely upon his word, and we do not know what he will do; he promised that he would come to us, but he has changed his mind." The apostle declares here that he did not use lightness, or fickleness, either in giving his conditional promise, or in retracting it. He was not accustomed to speak without thinking what he was going to say. He was prompted by a worthy motive when he made the proposition to go to them, and an equally good motive swayed him when he resolved not to go. He tells them that his mind was not of the "yea and nay" order; but when he said "yea," he meant it, his yea was yea, and if he said "nay," he meant it, and his nay was nay.

This remark led the apostle further to say that the gospel which he preached was not of the "yea and nay" kind. It was something certain, settled, positive, fixed; it was not a variable gospel, nor a deceptive gospel. It was not a chameleon gospel, which changed its colour according to the light which fell upon it, but it was a clear and distinct gospel, given in all sincerity by the truthful and truth-loving Saviour who never used words in a double sense, but who said what he meant, and meant what he said. It was by this process of reasoning that the apostle was led up to the statement contained in our text concerning Christ: "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." That is now to be the theme of our meditation.

I. The first thing I notice in the text is, THE DIGNITY OF THE PROMISES. Notice the apostle's words: "For all the promises *of God* in him are yea."

These promises were all made *according to the purpose of his own will.* We sometimes read, or hear, or speak of the promises written in God's Word, but do not give them as much credit as if they were the promises of a friend, or of our father, or our brother. If we valued them more, we should believe them better. We have many proverbs to remind us what poor and frail things the promises of men are; but those of which Paul writes are "the promises of God." Men often change their minds; even the apostle did that, and therefore he was wise to try to take the thoughts of those, to whom he was writing, off from the promises even of an apostle, which were liable to change, and which might very properly not be carried out because of altered circumstances, and lead them away to the promises of God, which are unfailing and unchangeable, and are always fulfilled to his glory and to our profit. We little know what solemn things we are trifling with when we say that we cannot believe a certain promise. What! Has it come to this,—that God's own children cannot believe him? Is it so, that we, who say that "we love him because he first loved us," yet add to that declaration, "but there are some of his promises which we cannot believe"? I am afraid that we talk far too flippantly about our unbelief, and that we seek to shelter one another in it, instead of whipping ourselves out of it. To be unbelieving may be painful; but there is a more serious consideration than that, for it is sinful; it is heinous to the last degree when we feel—much more when we express—any incredulity with regard to "the promises of

God." Just turn that thought over in your minds for a minute or two, and see whether it does not crimson your face with shame to think that you should have had any suspicion about the fulfilment of promises made by "God, that cannot lie."

Even in the case of a man, a promise is something which comes from him, and yet, in a sense, which still remains with him. He cannot speak of promise, and let it blow away with the wind. It is his promise after he has uttered it; and those to whom it was given can bring it back to him, and say, "That is your promise, will you not fulfil it?" If a man repudiates his own pledged word, he does, in fact, repudiate the fruit of himself, the outgoing of his own life; and every promise of God partakes of his nature, there is in it something divine, something which comes distinctly from God, and which he will continue to own as his. Though it may have been spoken two or three thousand years ago, or longer than that, yet it is still his promise, and part and parcel of himself. Well, then, if God will own it as his promise, shall I, to whom it is given in infinite mercy, doubt whether it is his promise or not? And shall I even venture to go further than that, and, knowing it to be his promise, shall I begin to question how he can fulfil it, or whether he will fulfil it or not? God forbid! The dignity of the promise must not be insulted by our doubting it.

Kindly observe the position of the promise, which is a very singular one. *It is a kind of link between the divine thought and the divine act.* It is not at all a necessary link so far as God is concerned, but it is often a most necessary and consoling link to us. There is the eternal purpose that has ever been in God's secret mind, and his promise is the shadow which that purpose casts upon the revealed page. It is the divine decree made manifest; and it stands there, bright and sparkling, between the decree, which our eyes cannot and dare not look upon, and the blessed fulfilment which is to be our joy and delight for ever. I confess that I cannot think of God's eternal purposes without the utmost awe and reverence; for, to me, there is something very solemn and impressive about them. I know that some people speak as though they would trample them in the mire if they could; but whenever I hear a word against the promises, the providences, the decrees, and the purposes of God, I feel inclined to do as a negro slave did, under certain circumstances, in the presence of his master. While waiting upon his master, who frequently took the name of God in vain, and blasphemed it most terribly in his cursing, the black man bowed his head. His master asked him why he did so, and he replied that it was because his soul was full of trembling at the very name of God, and he wished to do him reverence, even while he was being blasphemed and insulted. So, whenever I hear or read of anyone speaking or writing against the divine decrees, I feel anxious at once to bow my head, and to prostrate myself in homage before that eternal mind which knows no new thought,—for God knew all things from the beginning,—and to adore that infinite wisdom which has planned everything from the flitting of a sparrow to the flight of the archangel. It is very wonderful to me to think of a promise in the Scriptures being virtually the manifestation of God's everlasting purposes. I might compare the purpose

to God himself,—invisible, and the promise to the Incarnate God, who was born at Bethlehem, and who came to earth to be seen of men.

Think yet again of the promise of God, and you will see how a sense of its dignity grows upon you while you are meditating upon it. Consider, next, that *the truth of God is irrevocably bound up with his promise.* If a man says, "Such a thing shall be done," he ought to do it if it is in his power. We have no right to break promises that we have made; we feel that, if we do, men will learn to distrust us, and soon will care nothing at all for our promises. But, beloved,—and we speak with the utmost reverence concerning the Most High,—his character for truthfulness would be lost if his promises were not kept; and, while it would be an awful loss to us to miss what he has promised, it would be a far greater loss to him to lose his truthfulness. We rejoice that, as a matter of fact, this is a thing which can never happen. All things except this are possible with God, but it is not possible for him to be God and yet to fail in the fulfilment of his promises. The two ideas will not run together at all. If he is God, he must be true to his truth, and he will be; so, when I read a promise in his Word, I read something which is as certain as a fact already accomplished, since, if it were not to come to pass, God's glory would suffer an eclipse, and his veracity would be impugned, and that can never be.

Nor is the truth of God the only attribute which would suffer if he failed to fulfil his promise, for *his immutability would also be put in jeopardy.* If he makes a promise, and yet does not fulfil it in due time, then he must have changed; the motives which led to the making of the promise have now no influence over him, and he has become something different from what he was when he made the promise. But God must be immutable. It cannot be possible for him to change for the better, for he is infinitely good; and, certainly, he cannot change for the worse, for, if he did, then he would be something less than he might be, and so he would not be God at all. Change is impossible to him; he can never change his will, and his promise, as one of the most solemn declarations of his will, must be fulfilled when he has once made it. Surely, no one of us would wish or dare to deny either the truthfulness or the unchangeableness of God.

Further, *his power is bound up with his promise.* Shall it ever be said that God failed to keep his promise because he could not keep it, or because he miscalculated his resources, or his arm waxed short, or the great deeps of his eternal Godhead became dried up? No; that cannot be, for what he has promised he will always be able to perform.

So, then, if we slight the promises of God, we slight also his truth, his immutability, and his power.

And we also seriously *compromise his mercy and his love.* It was love that moved him to give the promise. He might have bestowed the blessing without promising to do so, and that would have been a gracious proof of his love; but, because the promise has a sweet, consoling power in it, he has been pleased to give it to us as a further proof of his love; and if he does not grant the boon at once when he promises it, the delay is all for loving reasons; but, having given the

promise, he must keep it because of his love. His love must be changed if it does not constrain him to fulfil what it caused him to promise; but that can never be, and we must not—we dare not—cast such a slight upon the promise of God as to imagine, for a moment, that it can remain unfulfilled.

So much, then, concerning the dignity of the promises.

II. Still keeping closely to the text, I want you to notice, next, THE RANGE OF THE PROMISES, for Paul here speaks of "*all* the promises of God."

There is a prospect for you: "All the promises." There are very many of them, and they are found in both the Old and the New Testaments. There was one given at the gates of the garden of Eden, very near the commencement of human history. There is another right at the end of the Revelation: "Surely I come quickly." The Bible is a Book of precious promises; all the way we have to travel, they seem to be like a series of stepping-stones across the stream of time, and we may march from one promise to another, and never wet our feet all the way from earth to heaven, if we do but know how to keep our eyes open, and to find the right promise to step upon. "All the promises," the Old Testament ones as well as those in the New Testament, are sure and steadfast. The conditional promises—if we believe, and if we repent,—God will certainly fulfil; and the unconditional ones—the promises of the everlasting covenant, in which he pledges himself to give men repentance, and to give them new hearts and right spirits,—he will keep them, too.

God will fulfil all temporal promises. Bread shall be given you, and water shall be assured unto you, if you are the Lord's children. He will keep his promises about temporal affairs as well as those which concern everlasting joys and blessings. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." You may speak of the promises in any way that you please, and then you may say that the Lord will keep them all; you may pick out the promise to the prisoner, the promise to the sinner, the promise to the backslider, the promise to the doubting one, the promise to the aged, the promise to the young, the promise to her that halteth, the promise to the barren woman, the promise to the strong, the promise to those who have full assurance of faith, the promise to those who love the Lord, the promise to those who delight themselves in the Lord, and then you may confidently declare, concerning all these promises to all sorts and conditions of people, that the Lord will surely keep every one of them.

"All the promises." Why, here is a grand granaryful! Who can sort them all out? Promises of pardon to the seeking sinner; promises of justification to the believing child; promises of sanctification to him who is struggling against sin; promises of the supply of all kinds of spiritual food to the flock of Christ; promises of guidance; promises of preservation; promises of holy education; promises of peace and joy; promises of hope; promises of the sustenance of our love; promises for death; promises for judgment; promises for glory; promises that reach to all eternity. "All the promises." What a range of vision this expression opens up! Go forth presently, and lift up thine eyes, and gaze upon the stars; see whether thou canst number them all, do they not far exceed all thy powers of

numeration? Yet, if thou couldst count the stars, and weigh them in scales, and tabulate the measure of their light, thou couldst not count the promises of God, or estimate their true value, or know how infinitely precious is the light divine which streams from them into a believing soul. If God does not fulfil a single promise to me for the next fifty years, I shall be perfectly satisfied to live on the promises themselves, if my faith shall but be sustained by his grace. I may fairly talk thus, for you would say, "I do not need a single penny to spend, as long as ever I live, if I can but always have plenty of £5 notes; I shall never care if I do not see a sovereign again, so long as I can always have the promise of the Bank of England to pay me on demand all that I need." So let it be with the promises of God. Men's promises are but breath, they would never feed us; but God's promises can satisfy us, for they are the substance of the things hoped for; and faith, the evidence of things not seen, rejoices to see that which is invisible, to lay hold of that which it cannot touch, and to feed upon that which, as yet, it cannot taste. Faith works wonders. It enables a man to project himself right into eternity. He sits down, and sighs, and sorrows, and then he says to himself, "This will never do, I will trust in the Lord;" and, in an instant, by faith he walks the golden streets, and sings the everlasting songs. He is not obliged to live in this narrow sphere of time and sense, for, by faith, he spreads his wings, and, like the lark, he ascends and sings. He soars far more rapidly than even the eagle, and finds himself already enjoying the things which God has prepared for them that love him, and so he is happy in the Lord.

III. Now I must turn to my third point, which is in the very heart of the text: "For all the promises of God *in him are yea, and in him Amen.*" These words teach us THE STABILITY OF THE PROMISES.

The promises of God are very firm, for, first, *they are settled on an everlasting basis,* for they are promises in Christ. As I look at the text, I can see two words leaping up out of it; and as I look at it again, I see the same two words leaping up again: "*in him.*" "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." There is a great thought which I cannot fully open up to you now, you must lie awake to-night, and think over it, and pray over it: "All the promises of God in him." What a great Christ you have, to have "all the promises of God" within himself! The range of the promises seems to be infinite, and yet Christ is great enough to be the circumference that shuts them all in. Do rejoice in this great truth, that "all the promises of God" are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And in Christ they are said to be "Yea." That is a Greek word, so this is a message to Gentiles. "And in him Amen." That is a Hebrew word, and is therefore for the Jews. You may have noticed how, whenever the Holy Spirit wishes to impress any truth upon us with more than usual solemnity, he uses two languages, as in the case of "Abba, Father." In this way, all the saints of God, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, may have their portion of meat in due season.

"All the promises of God in him are "yea." That is, they are certain. "And in him Amen." That is, they are accomplished. We may say, after every promise of God, "Yea, so it is. Amen, so let it be." There is but a slight variation in the meaning of the

words, but it is enough to let us see that there is no tautology here, not even if the words are translated, "All the promises of God are yea," that is, true; "and they are Amen;" that is, they shall be accomplished in Christ Jesus.

The stability of the promises in Christ is established beyond all hazard, first, because Christ is God's Witness. If anyone asks, "Did God make this promise?" Christ comes forward, and says, "Yes, I heard him say it." Christ is "the faithful and true Witness." He bears witness of God and for God to the sons of men; and he sets his seal to every divine promise, and certifies it with his "Yea and Amen."

Next, the promises are sure in Christ, because he is God's Representative. He is always doing the Father's will, even as he has done it in the past. When he came to earth, and died upon the cross, he accomplished the work of redemption upon which God's heart was set; and he is still doing the Father's will. Whatever Jesus has said, God has said, for he speaks the words of God. The Father sent him into the world as his Representative, and he spoke not merely his own words, but the words of the Father who sent him.

Then, next, Jesus is the Surety of the covenant. The promise was at first made to Adam. If Adam keeps the command of God, and does not touch the forbidden fruit, he and those whom he represents shall have all manner of good things. But Adam transgressed the law of the Lord, so that covenant was made void. The second covenant is on this wise. If Jesus Christ, the second Adam, will do this and that, then all whom he represents shall have the blessings guaranteed in the covenant. The Lord Jesus has done all that he agreed to do; he has kept the law, and so has honoured it, and he has also died, and borne the sentence of the law. He has thus offered both an active and a passive obedience to the law of God, and now all the promises of God must be kept to Christ, for they are "Yea and Amen" in him. Take those great promises in the fifty-third of Isaiah: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." These are promises, first to the Head, and then to us the members of his mystical body; first to the second Adam, and then to all who, by a living faith, are included in his federal headship. So the promises are "Yea and Amen" in him.

And as long as Jesus Christ lives, they are also "Yea and Amen" in this sense,—that he is seeing to their being carried out. He is interceding before the throne for us that the promises of God may meet our distresses. O brethren, all the promises must be true in Christ, because God spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all; and, having given him, will he not, with him, also freely give us all things? If God had meant to run back from any promise, he would surely have run back from the promise to give his only-begotten Son; but, having fulfilled that, what promise is there that he will ever break? Moreover, in the gift of Christ, he has

virtually and really given us all things; for if Christ is yours, all things are yours. All things are in Christ; so, having him, you possess all. There is no desire of your spirit, or need of your nature, that shall remain unsatisfied when once you have Christ as yours. You have heaven, and earth, and all things that are or ever shall be, encompassed in that blessed One whose very name is "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness." O beloved, rejoice with all your heart that every promise of God is sure in Christ Jesus to all his true seed!

IV. Now let us consider the last words of the text: "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, *unto the glory of God by us*." This impression teaches us THE RESULT OF THE PROMISES.

So then, dear friends, the promises of God are his glory. There is no pretended god that has ever been supposed to make promises like those of our God. Turn to the Koran, and see what Mohammed has promised. Ah, me! What a beggarly array of promises does he set before his followers! Turn to Brahma and Buddha, and read all the so-called sacred books written by their priests, and see what their gods are said to have promised. You can put the essence of it all into an egg-shell, and not see it even then. But our God has promised more than heaven and earth can hold. He has promised to give himself to his people. He is the great Promiser,—the mighty Promiser. I set the promises of God in comparison and contrast with all the promises that were ever made in connection with all false systems of religion under heaven, and unhesitatingly declare that there are none that can compare for an instant with the promises of the Most High.

It was greatly to God's glory to make those promises all sure, for they all depended at first upon the condition that Christ should obey the Father's will. But he has done it; and oh, what a glory it is to God that "he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"! The gift of the Redeemer, the life of the Redeemer, the death of the Redeemer, the intercession of the Redeemer, the making the promises sure,—all this is greatly to the glory of God.

And now it is to the glory of God to keep every promise that he has made. There is not one which, if it were broken, would redound to his praise or increase his honour. Nay, and there is not one but, when it is kept, reflects fresh honour upon him, and brings still further renown to his ever-blessed name.

If I had time, I would enlarge upon all these points; but as it is already past our usual hour for closing the service, I must end my discourse with a brief reference to the last words in our text: "unto the glory of God by us." While I was thinking earnestly over my text, I fancied that those two little words, "by us," seemed to spoil that grand word "glory" and that greater word "God." "To the glory of God"—"by us;" what a contrast! It is even more marked than in that old story of the organ-blower who would persist in saying, "*We* did it," when all that he did was just to pump the air into the organ. Must we be mentioned at all? Is it not a pity to bring us in? But, as I turned the subject over in my mind, I thought, "Oh, no, no; it is quite right to bring us in here!" Now

look. God wants to have the glory of being merciful; yes, but he cannot have that glory unless there is a sinner somewhere to whom he can show mercy; a sinner is an essential part of the whole business. Suppose that the king, who made the great supper, had said to his servants, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in;" and that they had come back to him, and said, "There is not a single creature under the hedges or in the highways; there is not even a solitary beggar anywhere about the streets or lanes of the city." Then he could not have had the feast, whatever dainties he might have prepared, if he had not anybody to eat them. It would have been a mournful business to have the oxen and fatlings killed, and heaped upon the tables, yet nobody to sit down to partake of them. Even the king, if he is to have honour, must be dependent for once on the beggars in the highways and hedges. Is not this wonderful? God wants to show his power in pardoning my sin, but he cannot do it if I have no sin to be pardoned; and if I do not come to him to be pardoned, and do not ask for his mercy, then it lies like dead capital never spent. The Lord delights to help the weak; it is his joy to do it; but suppose that there is no weak person anywhere, what is to happen then? Ah! but I think I hear the weak souls crying out, "By us! By us! 'To the glory of God by us.' He delights to help the poor and needy, and he cannot do so if there are not some poor and needy ones for him to help; so, when we seek his aid, it is 'to the glory of God by us.'" And the Lord delights to make his strength perfect in our weakness. I think I hear Paul crying out, and he is the man who wrote these words, "by us,"—"God is glorified by my weakness." And I hear many of you, who are trying to serve your Lord and Master, saying, "Ah, then! that is why such weak ones as we feel ourselves to be are used, 'to the glory of God by us.'"

Come along, then, all you who need God's mercy; you have laid hold of one of his promises, and feel that you need and must have all that it includes. With utmost reverence would I say that God himself cannot be glorified by the promise without you. If he intends to feed the hungry, then the hungry are essential to the accomplishment of his purpose. If he would clothe the naked, then there must be naked ones for him to clothe. Is there not a mine of comfort here for you who have been almost without hope? I trust that some of you poor lost ones will say in your hearts, if you do not utter it with your voices, "Are we really essential to God's glory? Does God need our poverty, and our sinfulness, and our nothingness, in order that he may, through them, display the greatness of his grace? Then we will certainly come to him just as we are." Do so, I pray you. Come! Come!! Come!!! May the Holy Spirit, by his omnipotent grace, draw you now, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

2 CORINTHIANS I., AND II. 1.

Chapter i. Verse 1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:*

Paul is very jealous of his apostleship. There were some in Corinth who denied it, and therefore he takes care, at the very commencement of this Epistle,—as he does in beginning most of his letters,—to write concerning himself, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." But with what humility of mind does he associate Timothy with himself! Frequently he puts Timothy, his own convert, one so young, and so much beneath him in position and attainments, on a level with himself; and if we also can help our younger brethren, how willingly should we put ourselves side by side with them!

2. *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What a wonderful source of grace and peace! "God our Father." How can he give other than grace and peace to his own children? "And from the Lord Jesus Christ," our redeeming Saviour, who has given himself for us, and who has graven our names on the palms of his hands;—is there not an abundant supply of grace and peace to be found in the very music of his name?

3. *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;*

Let me read those titles again: "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." Do not the second and third titles derive much of their significance from the first one? It is because God is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" that he becomes "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

4. *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

Experience teaches the first rank of God's servants, and their experience of sorrow and consolation is often the means of enabling them to be the means of blessing to others. Almost everything that the minister of the gospel enjoys or endures will be found to be sent to him for the elect's sake, that he may know how to teach them the lessons he has himself learned.

5. *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.*

Are we not willing to endure the greater suffering that we may enjoy the greater consolation?

6. *And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*

We receive both suffering and consolation for the sake of others, and we are bound to give out again all that we receive. It is the essence of the true Christian life first to be dependent upon God for everything, and then to give forth to all around us that which God has poured into our spirit. The heart would soon die if it pumped in the blood, and never pumped it out again; but it is by that perpetual process of giving out what it has received that it continues in life; and the highest form of Christian life is

the reception of all that comes to us out of the fulness of Christ, and then the free giving out of what he has bestowed.

7—10. *And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;*

No doubt Paul did preach all the better and with the greater confidence in God because he preached, like Richard Baxter, "as a dying man to dying men." His life was frequently in danger, and on this occasion it was so in a very remarkable degree; so, when he was again able to testify for his Master, he realized that he had no time to waste, and therefore he wrote and spoke with the utmost earnestness. He felt himself in jeopardy every hour, and therefore he fell back upon his God, and trusted alone in him. Anything that works to this end for us also is an undisguised blessing.

11. *Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.*

Much prayer leads to much thanksgiving. It should be a great cause for joy when numbers of Christians unite in praying for any Christian minister, for they will unite also in praising God on his behalf, when that which they asked for him is granted.

12. *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*

There had been whispers, among these Corinthians, that Paul had concealed a double meaning in some of his writings, and also that he had made a promise which he never intended to keep; so now he calls upon them to bear witness that he never was a man to act according to policy, but he was a straightforward, honest, plain-dealing man, full of godly sincerity and unselfishness. He had abundantly proved all this to the Corinthians, for, lest they should have any occasion for speaking against him, he would not take at their hands the support to which he was entitled, but he laboured at his trade of tent-making that they might not have anything to say concerning him except that he was disinterested in all his endeavours to serve them. Paul evidently felt their unkindness very much, but his conscience assured him that their accusations were unjust.

13, 14. *For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end; as also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are our's in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

See how Paul restrains himself in writing to these people. He had good cause to be offended, for they had touched him in a point about which he was very jealous, namely, his integrity; but here he speaks with great moderation of spirit, and herein lay his strength. Every Christian man, when he has to defend himself against false accusations, should use soft words and hard arguments.

15, 16. *And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; and to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judæa.*

He had planned to see them in his going, and also in his returning; but he could not carry out the idea which was in his mind. The wisest of men

often find their plans impracticable, and even an inspired man is not always inspired. God guides him when guidance is absolutely necessary; but, at other times, he leaves him to arrange according to his own judgment, and to find out that his judgment is not infallible. "I had a mind," says he, "to come and see you twice."

17. *When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness?*

"Did I make up my mind hastily, and then did I change it all of a sudden without good reason? Had I never thought before I decided, and therefore did I find it necessary to revoke my promise?"

17, 18. *Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay? But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.*

He binds up his own ministry with himself, and he says, "You charge me with being fickle, but you know better; you are well aware that I am not one who says one thing to-day and another thing to-morrow. You know that I have been open and aboveboard in all my dealings with you, and that I have never stooped to policy and craftiness, but have spoken that which I believed, whatever might come of it."

19. *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.*

He declares that he preached the truth straightforwardly and consistently, and that he did not say one thing one day and another thing a few days later.

20. *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*

Christ is no quicksand, slipping and sliding away, and so ruining those who cling to him. He is the Rock of ages, and he stands fast for ever. His gospel is one and the same at all times. You see that, as Paul grows warm, he advances in his argument. If the Corinthians suspected his honesty in making a promise, the next thing they would do would be to suspect the gospel, and after that they would suspect Christ himself, who is the truth.

21—23. *Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.*

"If I had come, I should have been obliged to rebuke you and reprove you. I should have had to be like an armed man going to battle, or an officer of the law carrying out the sentence pronounced upon a criminal, and I could not bear to do that; so I felt it would be better and wiser to stay away, and therefore I did not visit you as I had proposed."

24. *Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.* Chapter ii. Verse 1. *But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.*

And they ought to have had enough confidence in him to know that he had a very good and sufficient reason for not fulfilling his conditional promise. Let us, dear friends, who are one in Christ, trust each other; for, if suspicion be once bred among the people of God, it will mean farewell to all fellowship.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—191, 193, 192.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WAKING TO SEE CHRIST'S GLORY.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 21ST, 1900,
DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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"And when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him."—Luke ix. 32.

IT seems, at first sight, a strange thing that the apostles should have been asleep at such a time; yet, probably, if we think of the circumstances in which they were placed, and of the extreme excitement under which they must have laboured, it will not appear at all wonderful that "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep." In the 28th verse, it is written, concerning our Lord, "He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering." We know that the Saviour frequently retired to some quiet, secluded spot for fellowship with his Father; and that, sometimes, he spent the whole night in prayer. It is very probable that, on this occasion, he had been engaged in earnest prayer for several hours before the transfiguration came, and it is worthy of note that he was transfigured while he was praying. Every blessing comes to the great Head of the Church, and to all the members of his mystical body, through prayer. There is nothing promised to us without prayer; but, with prayer, everything is provided for us, and by prayer we shall ascend into the glory. I cannot tell how long the Lord had been in prayer; but, judging from his usual manner and custom, I should suppose that he had spent some hours in supplication. Even the three most highly favoured apostles were not as spiritually minded as he was, and they grew weary while he was still full of holy vigour and fervour. The most zealous amongst us might be tired of listening to the best man in the world if he were to keep on praying hour after hour, yet he himself might be enjoying a special baptism of the Spirit, and be quite unconscious of fatigue, and, in his wrestling with God, might be all the while going from strength to strength. We, who were merely onlookers, would probably grow drowsy, and be unable to keep up the strain as he would keep it up; our spirit might be willing enough

to sympathize with him, but the weakness of our flesh would make us, like the apostles, "heavy with sleep." I wonder not, therefore, if the Saviour's supplication was long-continued, that his disciples grew weary, and fell into a state of slumber.

Probably, however, their sleeping was the result of the extraordinary excitement through which they had passed; for, as in extreme pain, kind nature comes to the rescue, and causes a swooning or fainting fit by which the poor sufferer is relieved, so sometimes she comes in when there is a stress of mental excitement, whether joyous or grievous, and gives rest, even by unwilling slumber, to those who otherwise might have been exhausted. You remember, dear friends, that these very persons fell asleep in Gethsemane. When their Master rose up from his agony of prayer, and came back to them, "he found them sleeping for sorrow." They were themselves so depressed in spirit by his sufferings, that, although they had true sympathy with him, as far as they could have it, they fell asleep, and their Master, while gently chiding them, made excuse for them as he said, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

These apostles are not the only persons who have slept in the presence of the grandly supernatural. It happened so to Daniel,—that seer with the burning eye, who seemed as if he could look right into the glories of heaven without blinking or being blinded by the wondrous vision; yet, we read, in his 8th chapter, at the 18th verse, when an angel appeared to him, "Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright;" and further, in the 10th chapter, at the 8th verse, we read, "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground." These supernatural things are too much for mortal men to endure. The narrow compass of our mind cannot contain the infinite; and if, when we behold the glory of God to an unusual degree, we do not die, if our lives are spared after we have seen that great sight, at least the image of death must come upon us, and we must fall into a deep sleep. I will not, therefore, blame Peter, and James, and John, for sleeping on that memorable occasion, for I do not think that there was any sin in their slumbering under such circumstances. They were apostles, but they were only men; and being men, they were feeble creatures, and when they came into those deep waters, they were altogether out of their depth, so they began to sink in the ocean of the divine glory, and soon were lost in the unconsciousness of sleep. Marvel not, therefore, brethren, that you find these three apostles slumbering even in the presence of their transfigured Lord.

But, now,—and this will be our first head,—*it was necessary that they should be awake to see the glories of Christ.* Secondly, if you and I are to see the glories of Christ, *it is necessary that we also should be awake,* and that is more than can be said of all of us. I

may say to some, "Let us not sleep, as do others;" for there are many who are so soundly sleeping that they are quite oblivious of the glories of Christ. When I have spoken on those two points, I want to close my discourse by showing you that *this doctrine of the necessity of our wakefulness explains many things.*

I. "When they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." So, first, IT WAS NEEDFUL FOR THEM TO AWAKE TO SEE CHRIST'S GLORY.

It was necessary, first, *that Christ's transfiguration might be known to be a fact,*—not a dream, nor a piece of imagination, which had no real existence: "When they were awake, they saw his glory." It was a literal matter of fact to them. As surely as Christ was born at Bethlehem, as certainly as he toiled in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, as truly as his blessed feet trudged over the holy fields of Judæa, as truly as he healed the sick and preached the gospel wherever he went, and as really as he did actually die upon the cross of Calvary, so it is a matter of plain fact that Jesus Christ did, on a certain mountain—what mountain we do not know,—undergo a wonderful change, for the time being, in which his glory was marvellously and distinctly displayed so that his three disciples could see it. "And, behold, there talked with him two men;"—Elias, who never died, and who was there with him bodily, and Moses, who did die, and so may only have been there in spirit, unless that dispute, between Michael the archangel and the devil, about the body of Moses, may relate to the fetching away of that body that he might enjoy the same privilege as Enoch and Elias did. Of that matter, I know nothing; but those two men, Moses and Elias, were certainly there,—not merely in appearance, but in reality; and our Lord Jesus Christ was really transfigured: "the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering." It is true that Peter did not know what he said, but he knew what he saw when he was wide awake. The Revised Version renders our text, "When they were fully awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." They had not imagined this scene while they were in a semi-conscious state between sleeping and waking; it was no night vision or day dream, it was not something painted by fancy upon their eyeballs, and which had no actual existence; but it was a real meeting between their Lord and Moses and Elias. They did see Christ and his two companions from the glory-land, and they did hear the Father's voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." Peter did not know what he said, but he knew what he heard; he was wide awake enough to understand that message, and, long afterwards, he recalled it when he wrote concerning his Lord, "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." So, you see, dear friends, that they had to be awake in order that they might be able to confirm all this as an actual occurrence; and, to my mind, this is very pleasant. I like to remember that the Lord Jesus, the Man of sorrows, let some beams of his glory shine out even while he was here below; and if, in his humiliation, his transfigured face

appeared so bright, what must his glory be above, where his face shines brighter than the sun, and his eyes are as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace? What is now the matchless beauty of that visage which was marred more than that of any other man? When he did but for a moment withdraw the veil, his disciples were overwhelmed with the magnificence of the display; but what must it be to see his face for ever in the glory-land above?

Next, it was needful that the disciples should be awake, *that they might see the real glory of Christ.* I trust they were spiritual enough to know that the splendour which they saw was not the essential glory of Christ's Godhead, for that no man can see. Neither was it that secret spiritual glory which Christ always had, for that is not a sight for human eyes to behold, but for loving hearts to think of with reverent affection. But it was a special glory which was, for the time, shed upon his humanity, and even upon the garments in which that humanity was arrayed, so that "his raiment was white and glistering." The apostles then saw Christ in some measure as he will be by-and-by; and, being fully awake, they knew that it was not a phantasm that they were looking upon, but that it was real glory which streamed from the Saviour's face, and from every part of his most blessed and adorable person. We are glad to know that Christ has no fictitious honours, and no empty pomp; but that there is about him a real glory which our opened eyes may see, and which we may perceive without being fanatical or frenzied; such a glory as we can see in the time of our quiet, calm judgment, and earnest, deliberate thought, when every faculty is in full exercise, and our whole soul is in the enjoyment of the utmost degree of vigorous health. I care little for the visions that need night, and curtains, and dreams, before they can be perceived; I prefer the glory which can be seen by a man when he is fully awake, and all his faculties are aroused so that he is able to discern between truth and fiction, and to detect any imposition that may be attempted to be played upon him.

Further, these disciples were fully awake *that they might perceive somewhat of the greatness of Christ's glory.* Do you not envy these three holy men who saw our Lord in the holy mount? So glorious was he, that even the mountain itself was made "holy" wherein this transaction occurred, for so Peter called it; from that time it was as holy as Sinai itself, where God came down in terrible pomp of power to proclaim his law. Had not these apostles been wide awake, they would not have perceived how truly marvellous is Christ's glory. What would not any one of us give, just now, for a sight of Christ with our eyes wide awake? What must he be like who is the very centre of heaven's glory? All the grandeur of man is but external; but there is about Christ's very face a beauty of character which continually shines out,—the lustre of Deity which gleams through his humanity, so that, to see him as he is must be the fairest sight in the whole universe. To behold him but for a moment, must be the most dazzling vision that ever fell to the lot of men. Did you ever hear dying men and women talk about him when they have begun to see him? What strange words sometimes drop from their lips just

as they are departing this life—giving us just a hint as to how grand he must be whose glory the apostles saw when they were with him in the holy mount!

One thing which they were fully awake to see was this, *the singularity of the glory.* If you read the text, you will notice that, when they were awake, "they saw his glory,"—and the glory of Moses and Elias? Oh, no! not at all. But did they not see Moses and Elias? Yes, but mark how the text sinks, as it were, when it speaks of them: "They saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." There is nothing about any glory being around or upon them; they are nothing but "the two men that stood with him." He is fairer than the children of men, greater than Moses, and greater than Elias, mighty as both of them were. I think that we never truly see Christ until we behold him all alone; as we never see the sun and the stars at the same time. If you once see the sun flooding the sky with his glory, you will find that the stars have disappeared. The apostles saw the greatest of the prophets, and the great law-giver, after whom there was never the like till Christ himself came, yet the inspired record concerning the event is, "They saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." May you never see any earthly representatives of the Church of God in any higher place than this! In the Church, and in all its ministers, may you see his glory, and the men that stand with him; and when you look upon those whose feet are beautiful because they proclaim the gospel of Christ, yet may you only see his glory, and the men that stand with him to speak in his name!

The apostles needed to be wide awake to discern this difference, and so do we; for many, nowadays, seem to have no more respect for Christ than they have for his disciples. I trow that there are some who think more of a dogma, that was promulgated by Calvin, because it is Calvin's, than they do of that which Christ has preached because it is Christ's; and there are some who will refer everything they believe to "The Minutes of Conference," or the sayings of Mr. Wesley; but some of the sayings of Christ do not seem to have so much weight with them. As for us, I trust that we may ever see the true and noble men who stand with Christ; but, first of all, may we see his glory, because Christ has awakened us out of that sinful sleep in which we make no distinction between the Master and the servant! Happy are we if he has taught us that the greatest of his servants is not worthy to unloose the latchets of his shoes.

So much, then, upon the necessity for these three men being fully awake.

II. Now, brethren, let me speak to you upon the second part of our subject, which is, that IT IS NECESSARY FOR US ALSO TO BE AWAKE IF WE ARE TO SEE CHRIST'S GLORY.

We have not dreamt our religion, it has not come to us as a vision of the night; but when we were fully awake, we saw Christ's glory. We have seen his glory when we have been awake without weariness, awake without pain, awake without losses, awake without fears and tremblings; in our coolest moments, when there was the least likelihood of our being deceived, we have seen his glory as our Saviour, our Helper, our Keeper, our All-in-all. Set that fact down, then,

and stand to it before the face of every man who dares to speak a word against Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, that just as truly as "when they were awake, they saw his glory," so have we seen it in our most wakeful and calm and quiet moments.

But, dear friends, let me impress upon your minds the truth that, in order to see the glory of Christ, it is necessary that we should be fully awake. Are we fully awake? Is there a man among us who has even one eye wide open? Is there not a corner of it still sealed? Are our mental and spiritual faculties really quickened to the utmost, or are we not still, to a large extent, as dreamers compared with what we ought to be in the presence of Christ? Come now, brother, are your highest powers thoroughly aroused? I believe that it was so with Peter, and James, and John, and that what little spiritual faculty they then possessed—for they were then but babes in grace,—was fully aroused to learn all that could be learnt from their Lord and Master in that mysterious manifestation of his glory. Are we in such a condition as that? There are many things that tend to make the soul go off into sleep; so let us bestir ourselves, for, unless all our powers of mind and heart are fixed upon our Lord, we shall not fully behold his glory; and if ever there was a sight that demanded and deserved all a man's powers of vision, it is the sight of the glorious Saviour who stooped to die for us, and who now is at the Father's right hand interceding for us. When you do hear the gospel, hear it with both your ears, and with your whole heart and soul. When you are present in the assembly of the saints, be really there; and do not come, as some men do, leaving their real selves at home or at their place of business. They sit here, and we think that they are here, but they are not. Their thoughts are far away over the seas, or in their shops, even when the preacher is proclaiming the glorious gospel of the blessed God. You know that it is so with many, but we cannot expect to have a clear sight of Christ until we are fully awake as these three apostles were upon the mount.

But to what shall we be awake? Well, first, it is a good thing to be *awake to our present condition and circumstances.* Brothers, sisters, you would be in hell within an hour if God did not keep you from it by his grace. You, who think you know him best, need constant supplies of his grace, else you would fall into the most sorrowful condition. You are dependent upon him every instant, and for everything;—for consistency of life, for the smallest grain of faith, for hope, for love, for peace, for joy, for steadfastness, for courage, for everything, again I say. Now, dear friend, are you fully awake to that fact? Do any of us really feel how weak we are,—how sinful we are,—what floods of depravity there are pent up within us ready to burst out at any moment? Do we realize what terrible volcanic fires are hidden within our thoughts, as if the fury of Gehenna had entered our nature? And who alone can save us, and who does save us? Brethren, when you are thoroughly awake to your dangers, to your needs, to your weaknesses, then you will see Christ's glory. He is never rightly valued until we see ourselves to be utterly valueless. Low thoughts of self make high thoughts of Christ. Lord, awake us to know what we are, for then shall we begin to see the glories of thy Son!

We must also be thoroughly *awake to the mercies that we are constantly receiving*. Thousands of blessings come to us when we are sound asleep in our beds; and, oftentimes, we know nothing of many favours that come to us in broad daylight; we are asleep, as it were, concerning them. Think, dear Christian people, of your election; think of your redemption; think of your effectual calling; think of your cleansing by the precious blood; think of your washing by the Spirit with water by the Word; think how you have been upheld, supplied, educated, comforted, strengthened. Think of what yet remains for you of peace and joy in this life, and of the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let your mind contemplate all the mercies that are sure to come to you, and bless the Lord for them even before they do come, as faith reckons them to be hers already. When you are awake to all these mercies, then you will see your Lord's glory; all these blessings will make you see what a glorious Saviour—what an infinitely gracious Lord—he is to you. Father of mercies, wake us up to a sense of thy mercies, that we may see the glory of Jesus in them all!

And, dear friends, we ought also to be *awake to all manner of holy exercises*. For instance, when we are awake to prayer, then we see Christ's glory. What are our prayers often? At morning and night, a few hurried sentences, when we are either half-asleep or scarcely awake. I mean that, at night, we are ready to go to sleep over our devotions, and we nod even while we pray; and in the morning, when we get up, we have hardly time, through the demands of business, to spend a proper season in fellowship with our Lord. I bless God for our prayer-meetings, for there is much that is good in them; but do we, even there, pray as we should? Those who speak for us are often graciously helped, but are not those of us who sit silent, and who should be praying to God, often thinking of a thousand things instead of our supplications? Yet we cannot expect to meet with Christ while we are in prayer unless we are wide awake in it. Then think of our singing; praise is a blessed way of getting near to Christ; but sometimes people sing mechanically, as if they were wound up, like the old-fashioned organs that ground out a tune with painful regularity, the poor pipes knowing nothing, of course, about the sense or the meaning of the music, for there was no living hand to touch the keys. Yet we sometimes sing like that.

> "Hosannahs languish on our tongues,
> And our devotion dies."

But, oh! when we are thoroughly awake in our singing, then are we able to—

> "Behold the glories of the Lamb
> Amidst his Father's throne;"—

and then also we—

> "Prepare new honours for his name,
> And songs before unknown."

Many of us are coming presently to the table of our Lord; what will happen if we come there half-awake? Well, we shall not see the glory of Christ in his ordinance. There will be bread and there will

be wine; but, to us, there will be nothing more, no body of Christ, no blood of Christ, to be our spiritual meat and drink. The Master will not come and sit down with a company of nodding disciples, all fast asleep around the table which is the special memorial of his great love to us. "When they were awake, they saw his glory;" and it must be the same with us also.

Now I want to press this thought home a little more closely. Brethren, if we are *fully awake to holy service*, then we shall see the glory of Christ. Those among you who live to win souls for Christ, whose soul is all on fire to try and carry the gospel into some place where as yet it is not known, are certain to see the glory of Christ. While you serve him, you shall see his face, as they do who are with him in the glory. I have read a great many biographies of men and women who were full of doubts and fears; but when I have been reading about a man who was full of sacred zeal, one who was wholly consecrated to the service of his Saviour, I have found very little about his doubts and fears. Those two seraphic men, Whitefield and Wesley, seemed to have no time for depression of spirits. They were always about their Master's business. They flashed through the earth like flames of fire; they seemed to be so girt about by God with his strength that they rode upon the whirlwind; and, consequently, as a rule, they enjoyed the presence of their Lord, and were full of holy delight in him. So I believe it will be with those of us who addict ourselves to our Master's service with all our might. If you are doing nothing for Christ, you cannot expect to have his presence and blessing; but if you are serving him with all your heart, not from the low motive that you may win something by it, but entirely out of love to him, then will he come and manifest himself to you as he does not unto the world. Some Christians walk so slowly that sin easily overtakes them, while Christ goes far before them, for he always walks a good honest pace, and likes not the sluggard's crawling; and some professors seldom get beyond that pace, so they see but little of him whom they call Master. If they were awake,—awake to his service,—then they would see his glory.

But above all, dear friends, we must be *awake with regard to our Lord himself*. Oh, that our hearts were fully awake to his love! He says to each believer, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Does our wakeful heart reply, "Yes, Lord, that thou hast"? Are we awake to remember all that he did by way of love even to the death for us? Are we so awake as to have continually before us his divine and human person,—his blessed condescending life,—his wondrous atoning death? Are we wide enough awake to know that he is with us now? Do you not think that we are often like the disciples who saw Jesus standing by the sea, and knew not that it was Jesus? He comes to us in the way of sickness, in the way of bereavement, in the way of heart-searching; we do not know that it is Jesus, yet it is. Our eyes are holden because of our sleeping; if we were awake, we should soon perceive his glory. O blessed Saviour, by thy cross and passion, by thy glorious resurrection and ascension, arouse all our spirits to perceive that thou art not far from any one of thy people, and that thy word is still true, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

III. I must not keep you much longer, but I want to say that THIS DOCTRINE OF THE NECESSITY OF OUR WAKEFULNESS, IN ORDER THAT WE MAY SEE THE GLORY OF CHRIST, THROWS A LIGHT ON SEVERAL THINGS.

First, *it shows us why some see so little of the glory of Christ.* "Ah!" says one, "I used to see it; I could not get through a sermon without being moved at the thought of my Saviour suffering for me, and rising for me; but now I do not seem to get any good out of all the services I attend." Whose fault is that? It is not his, for he is unchanged. Is it mine? Perhaps so; and yet, since others do see him, surely the blame cannot be all mine. Is it not your fault, friend? You are not as wide awake as you used to be. It is a curious thing when a man says, "I do not know how it is that I cannot see as I used to do." Why, he has not got his eyes open! Foolish man, let him rouse himself; and when he is thoroughly awake, then his eyes will be as good as ever, and he will see as much of his Lord's glory as he used to do. Old age has not come upon you yet, my brother, though you sorrowfully sing,—

> "Where is the blessedness I knew
> When first I saw the Lord?"

Let me alter one line of the hymn, and then you may sing,—

> "Where is the wakefulness I knew,
> When first I saw the Lord?"

When you first joined the church, you were all-alive, every power of your being was full of zeal and earnestness. Do you recollect how you stood in the aisle, and never seemed to get tired? You wished that the preacher would keep on for another half-hour. You remember how you could walk several miles to the service then; and when the minister said, "I think you live too far away to worship with us," you replied, "Oh, no, sir! the distance is nothing when I get such food for my soul as I find here. I am glad of the walk; it does me good." Now you write a little note to say that you live so far off that you cannot often come to the services. It also happens that you live far from every other place of worship, too, so you begin to stay away from the house of God, and then you wonder that you feel no power and no delight in your Lord. Of course you do not, for you are sound asleep; when you again awake, you will see Christ's glory. Oh! for wakeful piety, earnest religion, and plenty of it;—no mere sprinkling of grace, but a thorough immersion into the very depths of it! May the Lord, in his mercy, cause you to be filled with all the fulness of God, by the power of his Spirit, till you shall be carried right away into a holy life that shall write over the natural life of your manhood, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Next, does not this fact explain why, *in trials, we often get our sweetest fellowship with Christ?* If I might mark out the happiest periods of my life, I should not choose those in which outward mercies have been multiplied, and success has followed success; but I think that I should specially note those times when abuse followed abuse, when I could hardly say a word without its being misrepresented, and something horrible being made out of things which were as good

as good could be,—when lies flew about me as bullets whistle round the warrior's ears in the midst of the battle;—then it was that I kept close to Christ, and lived on him alone, and I was among the happiest of the happy. When the dog barks, then the inmates of the household wake up, and the burglars will not be likely to get in; and, sometimes, our troubles are the very best things that can happen to us, because they wake us up, and drive Satan away, and fit us to see Christ's glory. We got into a careless, drowsy condition when we were rich and increased in goods, and then we went to sleep; so our Master came, and pulled the bed from under us, and made us feel the cold; then we woke up, and found that Christ was close beside us, and our heart was glad. Thus, affliction or trial is often a blessed means of grace, because it wakes us up, so that we see Christ's glory.

This fact also explains why *dying saints often declare that they have such blessed sights of Christ.* Is it not because, as they die, they really begin to live? They shake off the dull encumbrance of this house of clay, and they get into a clearer light, and so they truly live. They wake up when they die. All their lifetime, their business engagements or other cares occupied their thoughts; but now they have done with business, and with care, and they begin to awake, for the morning cometh,—the blessed, everlasting morning that shall never know an eventide, and they awake, and see the glory of their Lord; and we, who sit by their bedside, are often amazed, we cannot understand what they describe, for we are the sleeping ones, and they are the wakers, waking up to see Christ's glory.

But suppose that I were to take my text just for a minute, and project it a little way into the future. We shall soon fall asleep, brothers and sisters. Some of the older ones among us will certainly do so, others of us very probably will do so, and all of us, unless the Lord shall come first, shall soon fall into that last quiet slumber which we call death. But what a waking there will be, first of our soul, when we shall see our Lord as he is! What must the first five minutes in heaven be, if there are any minutes where time is swallowed up in eternity! What must be the joy when, for the first time, we enter that land where "they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light"! When we shall see the saints in heaven, I suppose that we shall not say much about them; they will be like Moses and Elias, "the two men that stood with him." But, oh! when we shall get our first glimpse of Jesus on his throne, what a sight that will be, ravishing beyond all conception! And then, when the next awakening comes, when the trumpet sounds its mighty blast, and these poor limbs arise out of their beds of clay, when we are awake, we shall see his glory. Then shall we be satisfied, when we awake in his likeness; and then shall his prayer be answered, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." Well, beloved, be content to go to bed when there is such a waking in store for you. Learn to die every day; regard your bed as a tomb; and every time you give yourself up to unconsciousness, and the image of death is upon you, be practising the art of dying, so that when, for the last time, you must go upstairs, and lie down once

again, it may be very, very sweet to feel, "I shall awake in the morning, the everlasting morning, when all these shadows of this night of grief and toil shall eternally have fled away. When I am awake, I shall see his glory."

The Lord grant to you and to me, dear friends, to know all the bliss of awakening to behold his glory! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.*

MATTHEW XVII. 1—5.

Verses 1, 2. *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

Were these "six days" a week's quiet interval, in which our Lord prepared himself for the singular transaction upon the "mountain apart"? Did the little company of three know from one Sabbath to another that such an amazing joy awaited them? The three were elect out of the elect, and favoured to see what none else in all the world might behold. Doubtless our Lord had reasons for his choice, as he has for every choice he makes; but he does not unveil them to us. The same three beheld the agony in the garden; perhaps the first sight was necessary to sustain their faith under the second.

The name of the "high mountain" can never be known; for those who knew the locality have left no information. Tabor, if you please; Hermon, if you prefer it. No one can decide. It was a lone and lofty hill.

While in prayer, the splendour of the Lord shone out. His face, lit up with its own inner glory, became a sun; and all his dress, like clouds irradiated by that sun, became white as the light itself. "He was transfigured before them:" he alone was the centre of what they saw. It was a marvellous unveiling of the hidden nature of the Lord Jesus. Then was, in one way, fulfilled the word of John: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory."

The transfiguration occurred but once: special views of the glory of Christ are not enjoyed every day. Our highest joy on earth is to see Jesus. There can be no greater bliss in heaven; but we shall be better able to endure the exceeding bliss when we have laid aside the burden of this flesh.

3. *And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

Thus the Law and the Prophets, "Moses and Elias," communed with our Lord, "talking with him," and entering into familiar conversation with their Lord. Saints long departed still live; live in their personality; are known by their names; and enjoy near access to Christ. It is a great joy to holy ones to be with Jesus: they find it heaven to be where they can talk with him. The heads of former dispensations conversed with the Lord as to his decease, by which a new economy would be ushered in. After condescending so long to his ignorant followers, it must have been a great relief to the human soul of Jesus to talk with two master-minds like those of Moses and Elijah. What a sight for the apostles, this glorious

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* Mr. SPURGEON does not appear to have commented on the chapter read before he preached the foregoing Sermon. It has, therefore, been decided to insert his exposition of the parallel passage in Matthew, as he wrote it for *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. This will enable his Sermon-readers, who do not possess his last literary work, to judge as to the contents of the volume upon which he was at work, just eight years ago, within a few days of receiving the home-call. It is one of the most precious of the many memorials of the "promoted" Pastor.

trio! They "appeared unto them," but they "talked with him;" the object of the two holy ones was not to converse with apostles, but with their Master. Although saints are seen of men, their fellowship is with Jesus.

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

The sight spoke to the three beholders, and they felt bound to answer to it. Peter must speak: "Then answered Peter." That which is uppermost comes out: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Everybody was of his opinion. Who would not have been? Because it was so good, he would fain stay in this beatific state, and get still more good from it. But he has not lost his reverence, and therefore he would have the great ones sheltered suitably. He submits the proposal to Jesus: "If thou wilt." He offers that, with his brethren, he will plan and build shrines for the three holy ones: "Let us make here three tabernacles." He does not propose to build for himself, and James, and John; but he says, "One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." His talk sounds rather like that of a bewildered child. He wanders a little; yet his expression is a most natural one. Who would not wish to abide in such society as this? Moses, and Elias, and Jesus: what company! But yet how unpractical is Peter! How selfish the one thought, "It is good for us"! What was to be done for the rest of the twelve, and for the other disciples, and for the wide, wide world? A sip of such bliss might be good for the three, but to continue to drink thereof might not have been really good even for them. Peter knew not what he said. The like might be said of many another excited utterance of enthusiastic saints.

5. *While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

"While he yet spake." Such wild talk might well be interrupted. What a blessed interruption! We may often thank the Lord for stopping our babbling. "A bright cloud overshadowed them." It was bright, and cast a shadow. They felt that they were entering it, and feared as they did so. It was a singular experience; yet we have had it repeated in our own cases. Do we not know what it is to get shadow out of brightness, and "a voice out of the cloud"? This is after the frequent manner of the Lord in dealing with his favoured ones.

The voice was clear and distinct. First came the divine attestation of the Sonship of our Lord, "This is my beloved Son," and the Father's declaration of delight in him, "in whom I am well pleased." What happiness for us that Jehovah is well pleased in Christ, and with all who are in him! Then followed the consequent divine requirement, "Hear ye him." It is better to hear the Son of God than to see saints, or to build tabernacles. This will please the Father more than all else that love can suggest.

The good pleasure of the Father in the Lord Jesus is a conspicuous part of his glory. The voice conveyed to the ear a greater glory than the lustre of light could communicate through the eye. The audible part of the transfiguration was as wonderful as the visible.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—421, 292, 425.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FALLEN ASLEEP.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 28TH, 1900,

(C. H. Spurgeon Memorial Sabbath,)

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, January 29th, 1882, just ten years before he also fell asleep in Jesus.

"Some are fallen asleep."—1 Corinthians xv. 6.

WRITING concerning the brethren who had seen the Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection, and of whom "above five hundred" were present at one time, Paul said that, at the date when he was writing this Epistle, "the greater part" remained alive, "but," he added, "some are fallen asleep."

We might have thought that God, in great mercy, would have preserved the lives of those five hundred brethren to an extreme old age, that, in every part of the globe, there might be extant, as long as possible, someone who would be able to say, "I beheld the Son of God when he was upon the earth. I heard him preach. I saw him die on the cross, and then I looked upon him again after he had risen from the grave;" for every one of these witnesses was worth his weight in gold to the Christian religion. Wherever such a man lived, he must have been, under the blessing of God, the means of convincing many people of the truth of our glorious faith. Yet, dear friends, it does not appear that these invaluable brethren were spared by the shafts of death. These witnesses of Christ's resurrection died as other men did. They had no immunity from death, and no extreme old age was granted to them, for the apostle, writing not so very long after the event, said, "Some are fallen asleep."

From this fact, I gather that lives, which appear to us to be extremely necessary, may not be so regarded by God. Your own observation will, I am sure, agree with mine, that the Lord sometimes takes away from us those whom we can least spare. Those, who seemed to be the pillars of the church, have been suddenly removed. The fathers amongst us, those who have been the bravest confessors of the faith, or the most useful servants of the Saviour,

have been called away. This should teach us,—if we are wise enough to learn the lesson,—to regard the most invaluable person in our own Israel as being only lent to us by the Lord, for a season, and liable to be summoned to higher service at any moment. Possibly, God takes some men away from us because we think them absolutely needful. He will not let us trust in an arm of flesh; and if he is so condescending as to use human feebleness, and then we go and confide in the feebleness, and suppose that God's strength is tied up to it, in secret jealousy he removes the instruments that he has used, that men may learn not to glory in their fellow-men, or to make idols out of their Christian brethren and fathers.

It is probable that these witnesses of Christ's resurrection enjoyed a large measure of reverence from the members of the Christian Church. Had they lived very long, they might have been regarded with a superstitious and almost idolatrous reverence. God intended that his Church should increasingly live by faith, not by sight; so, while she was in her infancy he gave her the prop of miracles and also the support of living witnesses; but when she had somewhat increased in strength, he no longer gave the power to work miracles, but left her to rest upon his Word alone; and as she further progressed, he, in a few years, took away the earthly witnesses of Christ's life, and death, and resurrection, that the Eternal Spirit, working through the Word, might stand, to all time, as the living and unfailing Witness of the fact that Jesus lived, and died, and "rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

The lesson for us all to learn is just this, let us not set too much store by any of God's servants; and, especially, let us never reckon that we are essential to the carrying on of his work. The fly upon the chariot wheel was easily to be dispensed with, and so are we. Like shadows have we come; like shadows shall we go. We may be missed; I hope we shall all live so that many will miss us when we are gone; but they will brush their tears away, and both the world and the Church—and especially the Church—will continue to go on without us. While Jesus lives, whoever may die, we shall never have to say, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof;" but still shall the Church of God flourish and increase, for the Spirit of God is with her.

Paul wrote, "Some are fallen asleep." Of course, all the witnesses, who saw Christ personally, have long ago fallen asleep; but, among ourselves, it is also true that "some are fallen asleep;" and the truth is impressed upon us more and more forcibly every week. I never expect now to come to this place, on two succeeding Sabbaths, without hearing that some one or other of our friends has departed. Our death-rate, for many years, has been wonderfully small, for God seems to have favoured us by sparing us to one another. We must not forget that, in past days, more of our number were young than is the case with us now; and as we all march onwards towards the inevitable river, the deaths will naturally be more numerous among us than they have been. They are beginning to be so already, and I am continually hearing of one or another of our most useful brethren or sisters being "called home." Almost every day, this

truth is impressed upon me: "Some are fallen asleep." I suppose that, all the year round, almost as regularly as the clock ticks, about two a week of our church-members, beside others out of the congregation, are taken up to dwell in the Master's presence. So my subject concerns us just as much as it did those of whom and to whom the apostle wrote.

I. Now, coming to the text, I call your attention, first, to THE FIGURE HERE USED: "Some are fallen asleep."

In the heathen part of the catacombs of Rome, the inscriptions over the place where their dead were buried are full of lamentation and despair. Indeed, the writers of those inscriptions do not appear to have been able to find words in which they could express their great distress, their agony of heart, at the loss of child, or husband, or friend. They pile the mournful words together, to try to describe their grief. Sometimes, they declare that the light has gone from their sky now their dear ones are taken from them. "Alas! alas!" says the record, "dear Caius has gone, and with him all joy is quenched for ever, for I shall see him no more." Heathenism is hopeless to afford any comfort to the bereaved. But when you come into that part of the catacombs which was devoted to Christian sepulture, everything is different. There you may constantly read these consoling words, "He sleeps in peace." There is nothing dreadful or despairing in the inscriptions there; they are submissive, they are cheerful, they are even thankful; frequently, they are victorious, and the most common emblem is—not the quenched torch, as it is on the heathen side, where the light is supposed to have gone out for ever,—but the palm branch, to signify that the victory remains eternally with the departed one. It is the glory of the Christian religion to have let light into the sepulchre, to have taken the sting away from death, and, in fact, to have made it no more death to die.

The figure here used is that of falling asleep; it describes first the act, and then the state: "Some are fallen asleep." That is the act of death. Having fallen asleep, they remain so; that is the state of death. For a Christian to die, is, according to Scripture, *an act of the most natural kind*, for it is but to fall asleep. What that act really is, in its literal meaning, I cannot fully explain to you, though I know by long personal experience; and all of you know, and will soon know again if you are permitted to fall asleep to-night and to wake in the morning. Yet you never knew exactly when you went to sleep. You have often wanted to go to sleep, but you could not; and probably nobody has ever gone to sleep while he has tried to do so; but it is when all idea of forcing slumber has gone from us that gradually we pass into a state of unconsciousness. Such, perhaps, is death;—the sinking away, and becoming unconscious of this world, and asleep to it, though happily conscious of another world, and sweetly awake to it. That is the act of falling asleep.

Then, after the act of falling asleep, which is death, comes *the state of sleep, in which rest is the main ingredient*. Are believers then asleep? Yes, and no. Never make a figure run on four legs when it was only meant to go on two. Some people, when they get hold of a metaphor, want to make it have as many feet as a centipede, and they seek to draw

all sorts of parallels which were never intended to be drawn. The fact is, that the saints sleep, first, as to their bodies. There they lie in the cemetery,—which means, the sleeping-place,—till dawns the bright illustrious day when those bodies shall wake again. As for their souls, they are asleep as to this world; their memory and their love are things of the past; they are alike unknowing and unknown as far as this earth is concerned. As to that other world, we read that they shall be "for ever with the Lord." Our Saviour said to the penitent thief, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise;" and the prayer of Christ for his people was, that we might be with him where he is,—not to be asleep,—but to behold his glory, the glory which the Father had given him. Hence, the word "sleep" is not to be regarded as implying that the souls of the departed lie in a state of unconsciousness. It is nothing of the kind; it is unconsciousness as to the things of time and sense, but a blessed consciousness as to another and a fairer and brighter and better world than this. Even while I am in this mortal state, when I am asleep, though I may be unaware of anything that is happening in my bedroom, yet, full often, in my sleep, my mind is soaring on the wings of eagles, mounting up to heaven, or diving into the depths, conscious of dreamland, and of the spirit land, though unconscious of the present world for the time being.

The meaning of the term is evidently this,—as sleep brings to us rest, the blessed ones, who have fallen asleep in Christ, are perfectly at rest. It is delightful for a man, who has worked very hard all day, to forget his toils, and fall asleep. Well did Young write, in his *Night Thoughts*, concerning—

"Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

In his sleep, the prisoner in the dungeon forgets his manacles; the slave in the galley forgets his bondage; the poor man forgets his poverty, and he who dreads the approach of danger, drinks a draught of the waters of Lethe, and remembers his fears no more. What a blessing sleep is to this poor, weary frame and to the throbbing brain! The saints in heaven have a better rest than sleep can give, but sleep is the nearest word we can find to describe the state of the blessed. They have no poverty, no toil, no anguish of spirit, no remorse, no struggling with indwelling sin, no battling with foes without and fears within. "They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Oh, what a sweet thing to fall asleep, if this be what it is,—to enjoy perfect repose, and to be beyond the reach of all influences which make life here to be so sorrowful! "Some are fallen asleep;" that is, they have entered into their rest.

By falling asleep, again, is meant *a state of security*. The man who is in the battle may be wounded, and may die; but he who has gone up to his chamber to sleep is supposed there to be at peace, and out of the reach of danger, though that is not always the case. But, in those heavenly chambers where the Lord shall hide away his people, they shall be perfectly secure. They will never have to keep watch against "the arrow that flieth by day," or "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." They are out of gunshot of the enemy. As

Dr. Payson said, when he was dying, "The battle is fought;" so is it with them, the battle is fought, and the victory is won for ever. Therefore have they ascended to the hill-tops of glory, and to the chambers of eternal rest; and there they sleep while we still struggle hand to hand with the enemy, with many a deadly thrust, and many an ugly wound. God be praised that there is a place of safety for all the soldiers of the cross! "Some are fallen asleep," and so shall we, in due time, if we are fighting under the banner of Emmanuel, God with us.

Now let us learn, from this figure of falling asleep, a little about death; and, especially, about a Christian's death. I learn from it, first, that *the act is not a painful one, nor even a disagreeable one.* As I have said before, I cannot really tell what falling asleep is, for in the very act we ourselves pass out of the consciousness of it; but, as far as one has watched children falling asleep, there certainly is no appearance of any pain, for usually they drop off into slumber very happily, and that is how God's people shall do when they fall asleep in Jesus. Do not regard your departure out of the world as a thing to be surrounded with horror; do not conjure up hobgoblins, and evil spirits, and darkness, and terror. "The valley of the shadow of death," of which David spoke, I do not think was ever meant to be applied to dying, for it is a valley that he walks through, and he comes out again at the other side of it; and it is not the valley of death, but only of "the shadow of death." I have walked through that valley many a time,—right through from one end of it to the other, and yet I have not died. The grim shadow of something worse than death has fallen over my spirit, but God has been with me, as he was with David, and his rod and his staff have comforted me; and many here can say the same, and I believe that, often, those who feel great gloom in going through "the valley of the shadow of death," feel no gloom at all when they come to the valley of death itself. There has generally been brightness there for the most sorrowful spirits; and those who, before coming there, have grovelled in the dust, have been enabled to mount as on eagles' wings when they have actually come to the place of their departure into the future state.

The more you think this matter over, the more clearly will it appear to you that there cannot be any pain in death; all pain must be connected with life, it is the living who suffer. In death, we forget all pain. That gentle touch, that divine love-pat that shall end all pain and sorrow, is the thing which men usually call death, but which the apostle rightly calls sleep. There is nothing to be dreaded in it; it may be altogether unattended with pain; I believe that, full often, it is so. To fall asleep is a very natural act, and so it is for us to die. A little child has been playing in the field gathering buttercups and daisies all day long; but, at last, tired right out, he drops asleep upon his mother's lap; what could he do better? So, though we may be unwilling to die, the time will come when we shall have finished our life,—work or play, whichever you may please to call it,—and we shall fall asleep upon the bosom of our God; what better thing could we do? There is a dear old friend of mine, now in heaven; and when he came to this house, one Sabbath-day, I said to him, "Our

old friend So-and-so has gone home." The one to whom I spoke was an old man himself, one of our most gracious elders, and he looked at me in a most significant way, and his eyes twinkled as he said, "He could not do better, dear Pastor; he could not do better; and you and I will do the same thing one of these days. We also shall go home!" Our aged friend, as I told you, has himself gone home since that time, and now I may say of him, "He could not have done better." Why! that is where good children always go at night,—home. If they ran away, where would they go? When our night comes, beloved children of God, you and I also must go home; do we feel at all afraid of such a prospect? If so, surely our love to our Heavenly Father, and to our Elder Brother, and to our home above, must be growing somewhat cold.

And then, again, *if we did not die, we should wish to do so.* Certainly, when people cannot sleep, that is the very thing they crave for. There have, perhaps, been times when you have been ready to take something which would help to keep you awake when you have needed to do some special work, or to watch over some precious sick one; but when night follows night, and there has been no sleep for you, you do not want anything to keep you awake then, but you long for sleep. "Oh, that I could sleep!" you cry. We regard it, always, as a bad symptom when the sufferer says, "I cannot sleep." The disciples said, concerning Lazarus, "If he sleep, he shall do well;" and they spoke wisely, although they misunderstood the meaning of the word sleep in that connection; and, surely, we shall do well when we fall asleep in Jesus. It shall become to us the most blessed thing that God himself can send us. Oh, if we could not die, it would be indeed horrible! Who wants to be chained to this poor life for a century or longer? There came to me one, of whom I may tell the story, for he is dead now; and he said that, if I would do his bidding, I should live for ever here, for he had discovered a great secret by which men need never die. I said to him, "Sir, you seem to me like a man of seventy, and I should say that you are getting on towards death yourself." He replied, "Oh, no! I expect some little rash will come out all over me, in a few years, and then I shall be quite young again, and start living for another hundred years." He told me that the people would believe his teaching when he had been here six or seven hundred years, and I answered that I thought it was very likely that they would! He offered to share his great secret with me, dear good man that he was; but I replied, "I would not give a button with the shank off to know it; why should I want to live in this wretched penal colony for ever?" He talked to me for some little time, and when he found that he could make no impression on me, to consummate his madness, he asked me to go outside my door with him; he lifted up the knocker, and rapped two or three times, saying very solemnly, "Too late! Too late! Ye cannot enter now." He said that he had shut me out of the blessing of living here for ever; so I said to him, "I am very much obliged to you for doing me such a kindness." He printed books, and gave lectures on the subject, being fully persuaded in his own mind that he would never die; but he has died, I knew he would, and I told him so. He said

it was my want of faith which made me talk like that, but he himself was confident that he should never die. Oh, what an awful thing it would be if that man's fad could be a fact! Superstition declares it to be the curse upon "the wandering Jew" that he should never die. God be thanked that such a curse has never fallen upon us! No, unless the Lord should come first, we shall fall asleep in him; and what a blessed thing it must be to fall asleep on the bosom of Christ! The child may be afraid to be put to bed in the dark, but it never fears to fall asleep upon its mother's breast; and we might dread to be laid to rest out there in the cold cemetery, all alone, but we do not fear to sleep in Jesus. Such a state as that is a thing to be desired, not to be dreaded.

II. Now let us come to our second point, THE THOUGHTS AROUSED BY THIS FIGURE: "Some are fallen asleep."

First, thinking about the many who have fallen asleep, let me ask,—*How did you treat them?* If your conscience pricks you concerning that matter, I want you to act towards the living saints in such a way as you would like to have done supposing you never see them again. When there has been an angry meeting or parting,—when there have been hard words spoken,—when there have been unkind thoughts,—when you could not enjoy true fellowship with some Christian friend, suppose that, the next morning, somebody came round to your house, and said, "Brother So-and-so is dead," you would feel deeply pained to think that he had fallen asleep after you had so treated him. People who have killed their minister by their unkindness,—and there have been, alas! many who have done so;—those who have killed other persons,—and there have been many of that sort, who have vexed and worried other people into their graves;—may well think, with great sorrow, "Some are fallen asleep, but we did not treat them with the love and kindness we ought to have shown to them." Think over that matter, dear friends, and see to it that no such regrets shall be possible to you.

"Some are fallen asleep." Then, *who is to fill their place?* Many have already gone from us this year, and others keep on going. Sunday-school teachers go: who will be "baptized for the dead," by taking their places in the ranks, and filling the gap? Hear this, ye church-members who are doing nothing for Christ! "Some are fallen asleep." Let that little sentence be a clarion call to you to wake up, and go, and occupy the vacant positions, that the work of Christ may know no lack in any part of his vineyard. Rouse ye! Rouse ye! you who are asleep in another sense, and now that so many are being taken away from us, dig up the talent that has been wrapped in a napkin, and buried in the earth, and put it out to blessed usury by employing it in the Master's service.

"Some have fallen asleep." *Then you and I also will fall asleep before long.* It cannot be a long while for some of you who are getting grey or white; it may be a very short time for some of us who have scarcely reached the middle of life; and even you young folk may soon fall asleep, too, for I have seen a child asleep in the morning as well as at night, and so have you. Oh! let us not live in this world as if we thought of staying here for ever; but let us

try to be like a pious Scotch minister, who was very ill, and, being asked by a friend whether he thought himself dying, answered, "Really, friend, I care not whether I am or not; for, if I die, I shall be with God; and if I live, he will be with me." There is not much to choose between those two blessed states; but let us recollect, by the memory of every one who has fallen asleep, that the time of our own departure is coming by-and-by, and it may be very soon!

But, as for those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, we need not fret or trouble ourselves about them. To cut their faces, in token of their mourning for the dead, was natural to the heathen; well might they torture themselves in their hopeless grief, for they believed the separation to be eternal. But as for us, when children go upstairs to bed, do their elder brothers and sisters, who sit up later, gather together, and cry because the other children have fallen asleep? Ah, no! they feel that they have not lost them, and they expect to meet again in the morning; and so do we! Therefore, let us not weep and lament to excess concerning the dear ones who are fallen asleep in Christ, for all is well with them. They are at rest: shall we weep about that? They are enjoying their eternal triumph: shall we weep about that? They are as full of bliss as they can possibly be: shall we weep about that? If any of your sons and daughters were taken away from you to be made into kings and queens in a foreign land, you might shed a tear or two at parting, but you would say, "It is for their good; let them go." And do you grudge your well-beloved their crown of glory, and all the bliss which God has bestowed upon them? If the departed could speak to us, they would say, "Bless God for us. Do not sit down and mourn because we have entered into his glory; but rather rejoice because we are with him where he is." Wherefore, let us comfort one another with these words.

III. Lastly, brethren, let us think, for just a minute or two, of THE HOPES CONFIRMED BY THIS FIGURE: "Some are fallen asleep."

First, *then, they are still ours.* If they were really dead, we might say that we had lost them; but as they have only fallen asleep, they are still ours. Wordsworth proclaimed a great truth in that simple little poem of his, "We are seven." There were some of the family buried in the churchyard, but the girl still declared that they were seven, and so they were. Did you ever notice, concerning Job's children, that when God gave him twice as much substance as he had before, he gave him only the same number of children as he formerly had? The Lord gave him twice as much gold, and twice as much of all sorts of property, but he only gave him the exact number of children that he had before. Why did he not give the patriarch double the number of children as well as twice the number of cattle? Why, because God reckoned the first ones as being his still. They were dead to Job's eye, but they were visible to Job's faith. God numbered them still as part of Job's family; and if you carefully count up how many children Job had, you will find that he had twice as many in the end as he had in the beginning. In the same way, consider your friends who are asleep in Christ as still

yours,—not lost, any one of them, and say of them "Some are fallen asleep." "Our membership has been diminished," says somebody. Yes, it has been, according to the church-book, and the figures as we reckon them here; but it has not really been diminished. I have, by faith, seen our brethren and sisters flying, like doves to their windows, and ascending to heaven from this place. Every week, some of them are going to the land beyond the skies. My soul has often rejoiced as I have thought of the spiritual children whom God has given me. I might almost claim that great promise which was made to Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be;" for, if they have not reached the number of the stars yet, they are no more to be reckoned than are the stars. As I remember how many of them have already reached the better land, I do not think of them as lost, for they only fell asleep here, to wake in the presence of Jesus. Their sleeping bodies also shall wake again when the resurrection trumpet sounds. No matter what has become of the particular particles of dust of which those bodies were composed, the essence of each individual shall be preserved by omnipotent power, and out of it shall spring an undying body, remodelled, and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and the soul shall enter it, and that soul shall be here again at the coming of Christ, for when he shall come in his glory, them also who sleep in Jesus will he bring with him, "wherefore," again I say unto you, "comfort one another with these words."

This is our last thought, *we shall meet again those who have fallen asleep.* We said, "Adieu" to them, and so committed them to God's keeping. We said, "Good-bye," that is, "God be with you;" and God has been with them. We said, "Farewell," and they have fared well; and we shall see how well they have fared to be with Christ, for we shall see them again. I believe that we shall know them, and have communion with them, and shall admire Christ's grace in them, and that it shall be part of our heaven to come not only "to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant," but also "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are written in heaven."

Now I have finished my discourse, but how far is there any comfort to some of you in all that I have said? Some of you work very hard: have you any hope of rest in heaven? If not, I do pity you, from the very depths of my heart. Some of you fare very hard: have you any hope of better fare with Christ for ever? If not, I do indeed pity you, more than I can tell. To go, from poverty and misery here, to a place where there shall be no hope for you for ever, will be dreadful indeed. If there were no hell, I could not endure the thought of being shut out of heaven; for, to be with Christ, to be with the Father, to be with the Holy Spirit, to miss the company of gracious and just men for ever, would be a hell that might well make men gnash their teeth in torment. Oh, may God save us all through faith which is in Christ Jesus! May we be saved to-night; and then it will not matter how soon anyone may say of us also, "They have fallen asleep," for all will be well with us for ever. God bless you, dear friends, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

REVELATION VII. 9—17; AND 1 CORINTHIANS XV. 1—28, AND 50—58.

We will read two passages from the New Testament to-night. The first will show us where the glorified saints are, and the second will tell us what is to become of their bodies.

Revelation vii. Verses 9—13. *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me,—*

In reply, as it were, to John's question put by the very look of his countenance. Sometimes, the Lord Jesus Christ gave an answer to men who had never spoken to him; and the angelic elder here followed his example, and also in another respect imitated his Lord, by replying to the inquisitive glance of John by asking him a question.

13—17. *What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

This is to be the future state of all those who are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, and to whom the saving grace of God has come; so that, concerning all who have thus fallen asleep, we sorrow not as those without hope, for we know that all is well with them for ever.

Now let us read a little of what the apostle Paul was inspired to write with regard to the resurrection of the body.

1 Corinthians xv. Verses 1, 2. *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

What, then, was this gospel which Paul had preached, and which the Christians in Corinth had received,—the gospel which Paul declared would save them if they truly believed it? Was it a gospel made up merely of doctrines? No; it was a gospel formed of facts.

3. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*

That is the first fundamental fact in the gospel system. Blessed is the man who believes it, and rests his soul upon it.

4. *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

That grand fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead is rightly put next to his substitutionary sacrifice, for it is the very cornerstone of our holy faith. It is one of the essential doctrines which must be received

by us, for we cannot truly believe the gospel unless we accept the great truth of Christ's resurrection.

5—8. *And that he was seen of Cephas,*—that is, Peter,—*then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*

I suppose, brethren, that we may have persons arise, who will doubt whether there was ever such a man as Julius Cæsar, or Napoleon Bonaparte; and when they do,—when all reliable history is flung to the winds,—then, but not till then, may they begin to question whether Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for this historical fact is attested by more witnesses than almost any other fact that stands on record in history, whether sacred or profane. The risen Christ was seen by many persons who knew him intimately before he died, by those who saw him put to death, and who saw him when he was dead. He was seen, on various occasions, privately, by one, by two, by twelve, of those who had been his companions for years; at other times, he was seen, in public, by large numbers who could not all have been deceived. These men were so certain that this was indeed the same Christ who had lived, and died, that, although it was at first difficult to make them believe that he had risen from the dead, it was impossible to make them doubt it afterwards, and the major part of them died to bear witness to the fact, they were martyred because they confessed that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. There is no fact in history, from the days of Adam until now, that is better attested than this great central truth of the resurrection of Christ; so we accept it, and receive it gladly. Paul finishes up his list of witnesses by putting himself down as one of them, although his conversion was, to himself, such a marvellous display of divine grace that he was like "one born out of due time."

9—14. *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed. Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*

It is all emptiness together. Our preaching evaporates—there is nothing left in it—unless Christ did really rise from the dead; and your faith has nothing in it either, you are believing in that which is only vanity and nothingness unless his resurrection was a fact.

15—17. *Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*

So that you cannot be a Christian if you deny the resurrection of Christ. You must give up Christianity altogether, and confess that your faith in it was a delusion, unless you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and that therefore there is a resurrection from the dead for the sons of men. Let it ever be most clearly understood that what Christ is, that his people are. There is an unbroken union between the Head and the members, so that, if he lives, they live; and if he lives not, then they live not; and if they live not, then he lives not. Jesus and those for whom he died are so intimately joined together that they are really and truly one, and nothing can ever separate them.

18, 19. *Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

That is to say, if our hope for the future be all a lie, we have been dreadfully deceived; and, moreover, if we could lose a hope so brilliant as that has been to us, there would fall upon us a sense of loss so great that no one in the world could be so wretched as we should be. Besides, the apostles being always in jeopardy of their lives, if they were suffering poverty, and persecution, and the fear of death by martyrdom, all for a lie, they were indeed of all men the most deluded, and the most miserable. But the Corinthians would not admit that, neither will we.

20. *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits—*

He must always come first, that in all things he may have the pre-eminence.

20—28. *Of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.*

The mediatorial person of Christ, as God-man, shall bow before the eternal majesty of the Godhead: "that God may be all in all."

Now we will finish our reading with just a few verses at the close of the chapter.

50, 51. *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

We shall not all die, some will be alive when Christ comes to this earth again; "but we shall all be changed," if not by the process of death and resurrection, yet by some other means.

52. *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall he raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Somehow or other, such a change as this must take place before we can enter heaven, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

53—58. *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

That should be the practical outcome of receiving the great truths of which we have been reading. God grant that it may be! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—852, 844, 865.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SUFFERING WITHOUT THE CAMP.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 4TH, 1900,
DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On Lord's-day Evening, January 3rd, 1858.

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."—Hebrews xiii. 12.

IN one sense, sanctification is wholly the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; but there is another meaning, which is more usually affixed to the term, in which sanctification is rightly described as the work of God the Holy Spirit. Many disputes have arisen concerning this doctrine, because all men do not distinguish between the two meanings of the same word. There is one kind of sanctification which signifies setting apart; and, in that sense, God's people were sanctified from all eternity. They were sanctified in election, before they had a being, for they were even then set apart from the impure mass, to be vessels of honour meet for the Master's use. Further, as redemption has in it much of peculiarity and speciality, God's people were sanctified, or set apart, by the blood of Christ, when on Mount Calvary he offered up himself, an offering without spot or blemish, for the sins of his people. So it is true that Jesus is not only made unto us wisdom and righteousness, but also sanctification.

You will remember that, in one of my recent sermons,* the text of which was "Jesus only," I made the remark that it was "Jesus only" for sanctification; and I have not had any reason to retract that expression; for there is a sense in which sanctification, as far as it means setting apart, is an eternal work, and is a work wholly completed for us by the election of the Father and the blood of Jesus Christ. Still, sanctification sometimes, and most generally, too, signifies another thing; it means the work of the Spirit within us. There is a work which God the Holy Ghost carries on, from the first moment of our spiritual birth, to the last moment when we are taken to heaven,—a work by which corruptions are overcome, lusts restrained, faith increased, love inflamed, hope brightened, and the spirit made fit to dwell with the glorified above. That is the work of God's Holy Spirit; yet we

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,634, "'Jesus only,' a Communion Meditation."

must remember that, even though it is the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ even in this still sanctifies his people. For with what does the Holy Spirit sanctify them? Beloved, he sanctifies them with the precious blood of Jesus. We know that, when our Saviour died, his sacrifice had a double object; one object was pardon, the other was cleansing; and both the blood and the water flowed from the same source, to show us that justification and sanctification both spring from the same divine fountain; and, though sanctification is the work of the Spirit in us, yet, to accomplish this purpose, the Holy Spirit uses the sacrificial blood of Jesus, and the sacred water of his atonement applied to our heart, sprinkling us from dead works, and purging us from an evil conscience, that we may serve God without let or hindrance.

So, then, Christian, in thy sanctification, look to Jesus. Remember that the Spirit sanctifies thee, but that he sanctifies thee through Jesus. He doth not sanctify thee through the works of the law, but through the atonement of Christ. And wilt thou therefore remember that, the nearer thou livest to the cross of Jesus, the more of sanctification, and growth, and increase in all spiritual blessings will his Spirit give to thee? So, then, we see that, whatever sanctification may mean, the text is still true: "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

Let us pause here a minute, and let each of us, as we begin a new year, ask this question,—How far has Christ's purpose of sanctifying me been answered in my own case? I know that, in one sense, I am completely sanctified; but, in another sense, I still feel my imperfections and infirmities. How far have I progressed in sanctification during the past year? How much has my faith increased during the year? How many of my corruptions have I overcome? How much nearer am I living to Christ, now, than on the first Sabbath of last year? How much do I know of the Saviour? How much closer do I approach in my likeness to him? Have I more power in prayer? Am I more careful in my life? Is my spirit more loving than it used to be? Am I more decisive for that which is right? At the same time, am I more meek in standing up for it? Am I, in all respects, more like my Master than I was a year ago? Or, on the other hand, have I been going backward? Stand still, I cannot; I must either go forward in grace or go backward. Which have I been doing during the past year? And I charge thee, O my heart, whatever answer thou hast to give to these questions, still to remember that, if thou art never so much sanctified, thou hast not yet attained perfection. I beseech thee, forget that which is behind, and press forward toward that which is before, looking still unto Jesus, who is both the Author and the Finisher of faith. The Lord give you so plenteously of his grace that you may be sanctified wholly, body, soul, and spirit; and I pray God to preserve you all unto his coming and glory.

I. But now the principal subject, upon which I wish to discourse, is the fact that JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED WITHOUT THE GATE.

You know that, when the high priest offered the sin-offering, because it typified sin, it was so obnoxious to God that it might not be

burned upon the great altar, but it was always burned without the camp, to show God's detestation of sin, and his determination not only to put it away from himself, but also to put it away from his Church. Now, when our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to be our Sin-offering, it behoved him also to be put outside the camp; and it is very interesting to note how remarkably Providence provided for the fulfilment of the type. Had our Lord been killed in a tumult, he would most likely have been slain in the city; unless he had been put to death judicially, he would not have been taken to the usual Mount of Doom. And it is remarkable that the Romans should have chosen a hill on the outside of the city to be the common place for crucifixion and for punishments by death. We might have imagined that they would have selected some mount in the centre of the city, and that they would have placed their gibbet in as conspicuous a spot as our Newgate, that so it might strike the multitude with the greater awe. But, in the providence of God, it was arranged otherwise. Christ must not be slain in a tumult, he might not die in the city; and when he was delivered into the hands of the Romans, they had not a place of execution within the city, but one outside the camp, that by dying without the gate, he might be proved to be the Sin-offering for his people.

Concerning this great truth, I have one or two remarks to offer to you very briefly. First, I want to ask you a question. *Do you know who the people were who lived outside the gate?* If you could have gone to the great camp of Israel, you would have seen the tents all placed in order, the standard of Dan there, of Judah there, of Ephraim there,—surrounding the ark of the covenant; but you would have seen a few wretched huts far away in the rear, outside the camp; and if you had asked, "Who lives there? Who are the poor people that are put away from kith and kin, and who cannot go up to the sanctuary of the Lord, to present their offerings unto him, or to join in the songs of praise unto his holy name?"—the answer to your enquiry would have been, "The people out there are lepers and others who are unclean." And if, in later days, you had walked through some of the shady glens around the city of Jerusalem, you might have heard in the distance the cry, "Unclean! unclean! unclean!"—a bitter wail that sounded like the sighing of despair, as if it came from some poor ghost that had been commanded to walk this earth with restless step for ever. Had you come nearer to the unhappy being, who had uttered so mournful a sound, you would have seen him cover his upper lip, and again cry, "Unclean! unclean! unclean!"—to warn you not to come too near him, lest even the wind should blow infection towards you from his leprous skin. If, for a minute, he had moved his hand from his mouth, you would have seen, instead of those scarlet, ruddy lips of health, which God had originally put there, a terrible white mark not to be distinguished from his teeth. His lips were unclean, for there the leprosy had discovered itself; and, in a minute, he would have again covered up that lip that had the white mark of disease upon it, and again he would have cried, "Unclean! unclean! unclean!"

Of whom was that leper a type? He was a picture of you and me,

my brethren, in our natural state; and if the Holy Spirit hath quickened us, and made us to know our ruined condition, we shall feel that the leper's cry doth well become our unholy lips. Mayhap, I have, within the walls of this house of prayer, a hearer who is to-day separate from all mankind. With worldlings, he dares not associate any longer; the harlots and others, with whom he spent his living riotously, are not now his companions; he cannot bear their pleasures, for they are dashed with bitterness. With the children of God, he dares not go; he feels that they would put him outside the camp, for he hath no hope, no Christ, no faith; he cannot say that Christ hath died for him; he hath no trust in Jesus, not so much as one pale ray of hope hath stolen into his poor bedarkened heart; and, to-night, the inward wail of his now-aroused spirit is,—

> "Unclean! unclean! unclean!
> Unclean, and full of sin,
> From first to last, O Lord, I've been
> Deceitful is my heart."

Leper, leper! be of good cheer; Christ died without the camp, that thou mightest be sanctified through his blood. I see the leper now stealing through the desert places, not daring to sip of the clear stream that lies in his track, lest he should communicate contagion to the next person who drinks from it; but seeking out some filthy puddle, that there he may satisfy his thirst, where no others are likely to drink. I see him covering up his lip. If his father met him, he must run away from him; if the wife of his bosom saw him, she must shun his presence, for a loathsome disease is in his skin, and in his garments; and in the very breath that comes from his lips there is death. Well, suddenly, as he steals along, he sees a cross, and on it lifted up One who is dying. He standeth there astonished; he thinketh that surely he may come near to a dying man, leper though he be; to the living, he must not approach, but to the dying he cannot bring a new death. So he draweth nigh to the cross, and the lips of the dying man are opened, and he says, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Oh; what joy and rapture rush through his poor leprous spirit! How his heart, that had long been heavy, and baked like a black coal within him, begins again to burn with lambent light! He smiles, for he feels that that marvellous Man upon the cross has forgiven him all his sins; and ere he has begun to feel it, his leprosy is cleansed, and, soon, he goes his way, for his flesh has come unto him like unto the flesh of a little child, and he is clean. O leprous sinner, hear this, and believe it for thyself! To-night look unto him who died without the camp, that poor unclean sinners might find a Saviour there.

That is my first lesson from the text; if the Lord the Spirit shall graciously apply it to your souls, it will be a very precious one to many a sin-distracted heart.

But, believer, didst thou never feel as if thou, too, wast unclean, and without the camp? Brethren, let me tell you just a little of my own heart's feelings, and let me see whether you have ever felt the

like. You have often known yourselves to be children of God; I have felt myself, with much joy, to be certainly assured of my interest in Christ; but, suddenly, sin has surprised me, some unhappy propensity has developed itself, and I have felt as if I could not meet my God. When I was on my knees in prayer, I seemed as if I could not pray; I felt like the unclean one that must be put outside the camp,—like Miriam, who, though the leprosy was but for a little time, would still be unclean for seven days. And when I have come to the house of God, I have felt as if the meanest Christians there were so much superior to myself that I would but have been glad to have been a footstool at their feet. I would have crept into any part of the fold, if I might but have known myself to be the meanest lamb in the flock of Jesus. I have seen the deacon, and I have seen the church-member, and I have thought, "Brethren, you are happy; but my heart is sad, for I am not worthy to be called God's son. Father, I have sinned; I have done grievously, and have transgressed against thee." For a little while, faith hath seemed sluggish, and hope hath been dull, and the sense of sin hath rested on us, and we have seemed to be quite put away from our Lord's presence. We have read the Bible; but we could get no comfort there. The heavens seemed like brass above our heads; no shower of grace fell upon our thirsty souls; both God and man seemed to put us outside the camp. I believe that, many times, in a Christian's experience, he will have to feel what I have been describing. I do not mean merely little Christians, but I mean the greatest Christians, those who have lived nearest to their God, those who have been eminent in the Lord's service,—God's Aarons and Miriams, who sometimes have to be put without the camp. Who, then, is there amongst us who will not sometimes be unclean? Surely, not any of the great ones of Israel could always live without contracting some ceremonial defilement; for you know that, under the Jewish law, the sitting upon the bed of a leper made a man unclean; and many things that happened to men rendered them unclean for seven days. And who can wonder if, through the infirmities of our bodies, through the companionships into which we are called, through the evil thoughts of our mind, we are often unclean as the Jews were? And who wonders that, sometimes, the Lord should put us, as it were, out of the camp for a little season, till we have been purged with hyssop, and have been made clean,—till we have again been thoroughly purified by the washing of water through the Word?

Ah! but, brethren, what a mercy it is that, when we are outside the gate, Christ is outside the gate, too! O poor backslider! doth thy conscience shut thee out of the Church to-day? Remember, Christ shut himself out, too. He was "despised and rejected of men." Dost thou feel, to-night, as it thou couldst not come to his table,—as if thy Master would spurn thee from it? Remember, if thou art his, thou art welcome; for his table is where his cross is, and his cross is outside the gate. Come, sinner! Come, backsliding saint! Come, and welcome! God may seem to have put thee away, but it is only seeming; for we know he has written that he hates to put away. Come, thou, and though thou be without the gate, behold thy Lord, who,

"that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

II. I have only one more thought to bring before your notice. The apostle says, in the next verse to our text, "Let us go forth, therefore, without the camp, bearing his reproach." So, AS CHRIST SUFFERED WITHOUT THE CAMP, LET US NOT BE ASHAMED TO SUFFER THERE, TOO.

I do not think much of the religion of that man who is not put without the camp. If thou canst dwell with the wicked, if thou canst live as they live, and be "hail-fellow well met" with the ungodly, if their practices are thy practices, if their pleasures are thy pleasures, then their god is thy god, and thou art one of them. There is no being a Christian without being shut out of the world's camp. I can scarcely conceive it possible for any man to be a true saint, a holy man, one who is set apart unto God, and sanctified in Christ Jesus, unless he is reproached whilst on earth for being too strict, too Puritanical, mayhap, sometimes too melancholy. There must be a grave distinction between a Christian and a man of the world; and where there is no such distinction, or only a slight one, there is most solemn cause for suspicion that all is not right. When I see a man dress like worldlings, when I hear him talk like worldlings, when I know that all his outward carriage is just like a worldly man's, when I can detect no difference, when I see no mark of the Lord Jesus upon him, when I can hear no "shibboleth" in his speech, whereby he is to be detected from a sibboleth-speaking world, when I discover no distinction between him and others, then this I know, "God is not mocked;" that man is in the flesh, and he shall "of the flesh reap corruption."

Nay, I will go further still. In this age I can scarcely imagine it possible for a man to serve his Master faithfully unless he is sometimes shut out of the camp, even of the Church itself. I do not mean excommunicated,—I mean something far different from that; I mean, that the man, who serves his God aright, will often feel himself left in the minority, even in the Church. It is never his business so to act, and so to think, that others are obliged to differ from him; it is folly to be singular, except where to be singular is to be right; but so lax hath the professing Church become, so low in its doctrine, so light in its experience, and sometimes so unholy in its life, that, to be Christians now, we must be elect out of the elect,—elect out of the Church as well as elect out of the world. What pride, on the one hand; what sloth, on the other; what anger, what distrust, what covetousness, what worldly-mindedness, we constantly see! The most of us are too much mingled with the world, too much joined unto Egypt; and the man who is firm in the faith, and loves his Master well, is a rarity. The man of a loving spirit, the man of a large heart, and yet of a determined zeal, and of a steadfast mind,—such a man will have to go without the camp; and he will have to suffer now, even as all have had to suffer who have dared to go into the front of the sacramental host of God's elect, in advance of the more tardy followers of the Lamb. If any minister of Christ dares to be too bold, too plain, too honest for the common run of professors, he must expect to be traduced. Let him reckon on that, and let him willingly

go forth without the camp, for that is where his Master went before him.

If I turn to the page of history, to find out the best men who ever lived, do you know where I find them? I never find them among those who were called "respectable" in their time. There, in the page of history, I see great names, Erasmus and others, mighty and learned men; but on a dirty-thumbed page, I see the name of Luther associated with such epithets as these: "dog, adulterer, beast," and everything else that Rome's malice could suggest; and I say, "Ah! this is the man whom God chose, for he went without the camp." That list of great divines, and of schoolmen, and of theologians—you may wipe them all out without much regret; but this man without the camp, he is somebody, depend upon it; he is the man whom God has blessed. Turn to another list of archbishops, bishops, deans, rural deans, rectors, and curates; there they are, all as respectable as possible, and great volumes of their sermons may be found on bookshelves, nowadays, with the dust of years upon them. I read their names; there is one, there is another, there is another; but there is nothing special about any of them. At last, I find a picture by Hogarth,—a caricature of a man preaching, with devils coming out of his mouth, and underneath it written, "Fire and brimstone!" I look at the portrait, and I say, "See, that is Mr. Whitefield." Ah! there is the man of the age, depend on it; that man, all black, charged with crimes that Sodom never knew; that is the man! Not the curate in the other picture, who is preaching to a congregation all asleep; but this man here that is abused, that is laughed at, that is mocked; this is the man who is somebody.

So, you may go on as long as you like, and you shall always find that those "intruders into the ministry," as some call them, those that the parliament of parsons dislikes, those that the great mass reject, and laugh and scoff at,—those are the very men whom God blesses. So, if you go outside the camp, you will be in very good company. The great and holy men of years gone by have all been put outside the camp. If an ungodly throng have thrust out our fathers, and have said, "Get you gone, we want you not," it is true, their children build their sepulchres, and then they thrust us out. What if it be so? We are content to share the lot of so goodly a parentage. We think it a high honour to be thrust out of those gates whose only glory is that good men once passed through them, and whose great disgrace is that good men pass through them the wrong way,—not into them, but out of them. So, beloved, be ye content to be cast without the camp.

But mark, going without the camp in itself is nothing; it is suffering without the camp that is the great thing. Making myself different from everybody else, is nothing; it is suffering for the truth's sake that is the truly noble thing. It is being crucified with Christ that is honourable. It is not my being a Sectarian or a Separatist, it is not your going outside the camp that is any good; it is your suffering without the camp that proves you to be a believer. O Christians, if ye have to do the same, rejoice! And now, as you come to this communion table, I shall bid you only recollect that word

suffered: "Jesus suffered without the gate;" and I shall ask you, as you sit there, to meditate upon that word. Turn it over again and again, and think how his body and his soul all suffered for you. Then, when you have meditated upon that great truth, will you be in a fit frame of mind to commune with him who has sanctified you by his own blood, by suffering without the gate.

May the God of mercies give to sinners grace, that, like lepers without the camp, they may look to Jesus crucified for them, and so obtain eternal life! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

JEREMIAH V. 1—6 AND 10—31; AND REVELATION XXII. 1—7.

Jeremiah v. Verse 1. *Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.*

It was a very wonderful offer, on the part of God, to forgive the inhabitants of the whole city of Jerusalem for the sake of one man; and it was all the more remarkable because he gave them time to make a thorough search to see whether such a person could be found: "if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth." Into what a horrible state of guilt must the Jewish capital have fallen when there was not one man, even among the magistrates or the priests, who cared for that which was just and true. May God prevent London and England from becoming like Jerusalem and Judah! May truth and righteousness flourish in our land!

2. *And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.*

Even those who assumed an appearance of being religious, and who said, "Jehovah liveth,"—even they were false swearers. To what a terribly sad state had the age come when its very religion was a lie, and its professedly holy things were thoroughly rotten!

3. *O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth?*

If there be any truthful man anywhere, God sees him. His eyes are upon him, he regards him with attentive delight, and he will take care of him with the utmost vigilance. But what was the real character of these people? Listen.

3. *Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.*

Nothing could make them act rightly; whatever God did with them, they still persisted in their iniquity.

4, 5. *Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, and the judgment of their God:*

But he found no improvement among them; they were even worse than the poor and ignorant, for he goes on to say,—

5, 6. *But these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.*

Now let us continue our reading at verse 10, where we shall see that both the house of Israel and the house of Judah had turned aside from the Lord their God.

10—12. *Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the* LORD'S. *For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the* LORD. *They have belied the* LORD,—

They have made it out as though God himself were a liar. They have contradicted him whose word is the truth itself. They have despised his threatenings, they have refused his invitations, they have disbelieved his promises: "they have belied the Lord,"—

12—14. *And said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: and the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them. Wherefore thus saith the* LORD *God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.*

It is a dreadful state of things when God turns from pleading with men to threatening them, when he ceases to invite them to return to him, and denounces them as transgressors against his laws. At such times, he makes the words that come out of the mouths of his prophets to be like fire, and men are utterly consumed by them as the stubble in the field is destroyed by the devouring flames.

15—18. *Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the* LORD: *it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. Nevertheless in those days, saith the* LORD, *I will not make a full end with you.*

See how, in the midst of his wrath, God remembers mercy. He utters a terrible sentence concerning transgressors, and then he pauses, and says, "Nevertheless,"—listen to the gentle note of pity in that word,—"Nevertheless in those days, saith the Lord, I will not make a full end with you." Still does he spare the guilty, and in his longsuffering he gives them further opportunities for repentance.

19. *And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the* LORD *our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not your's.*

A man may often see his sin in its punishment. Because they had served strange gods, therefore the Lord sent them to serve strangers in a strange land. Remember, O transgressor, that thy sin will come home to thee in some form or other! If we sow the wind, we shall reap the whirlwind. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Therefore, let us beware of scattering seeds of sin, for they will produce a terrible harvest of woe.

20, 21. *Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:*

And, alas! there are far too many of such people about still. They hear God's Word, yet it never reaches their hearts. They see what God's hand is doing all around them, yet they do not and they will not really see it as they should.

22. *Fear ye not me? saith the* LORD: *will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?*

There is a little belt of sand which checks the surging sea, and says to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." Now, if sand, which is so weak a thing, can, nevertheless, control the mighty ocean within bounds, how readily ought you and I to be governed by God, and held in check even by the slightest intimations of his will!

23. *But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.*

God restrains the sea, but nothing seems to be able to restrain the sinfulness of man. He breaks over every barrier that should keep him back; he is like a desolating torrent when he gives way to iniquity.

24. *Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the* LORD *our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.*

Though God gives timely and suitable seasons for the growth and ingathering of the corn,—rain when it is needed to aid the upspringing of the blade, and fine weather for garnering the harvest,—yet many men see not the hand of God at all, and they are therefore not moved by gratitude to bless his name, and fear him to whom they are indebted for all that they receive. Oh, what an ungrateful and blind creature is man!

25. *Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you.*

Does any unconverted man here know what good things he has missed up to the present moment? Suppose you, my friend, were to be saved to-night, yet can you even imagine what joy you have lost through all the years of your past impenitence? Nothing can ever give back to you the years that have gone, or impart to you, in the future, the joy you might have had, but which you have missed. And, mark you, if there were no hell to be endured, it is enough of hell to have missed heaven. It will be grief enough to your heart, at the last, to find that "your sins have withholden good things from you."

26. *For among my people are found wicked men:*

"Among my people," saith the Lord,—in the very church itself, making as loud a profession as the most genuine Christian,—"among my people are found wicked men." Here, in this place, to-night, mingling with the godly in this congregation, are found wicked men. The Lord have mercy upon them, and turn them from their evil ways!

26. *They lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.*

Beware of these man-catchers, who entrap souls, and ruin them for ever, ensnaring them by leading them into evil habits and transgressions.

27, 28. *As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked:—*

The manifestly wicked,—

28, 29. *They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things?*

Angels in heaven, God says to you, "Shall I not visit for these things?" And they answer, "Yea, Lord." Even to the devils in hell, he may put the same question. They are already smarting under his wrath, and he may

say to them, "Shall I not visit for these things?" And they also answer, "Yea." He puts the question to all intelligent beings who know what is right and true, "Shall I not visit for these things?" And they, with one consent, reply, "Yea, Lord; it must be so."

29—31. *Saith the* LORD: *shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so:*

It is a most horrible thing that God's own people should ever be willing that error should be preached, and that oppression and wrong-doing of any kind should be practised. You know that, if God's own people did not tolerate false doctrine, it would soon cease to be heard in many places. But it is when those who profess to know God's Word endorse that which is contrary to the truth that error is kept in power in the land: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."

31. *And what will ye do in the end thereof?*

That is a question which I would propose in God's name to all here. Is your religion of such a character that, when you come to die, it will bear you up? Or have you taken up with some form of falsehood which will not stand the test of your dying hour? Are you living in neglect of God? Is your life such that he must be angry with you, for he is angry with the wicked every day? Then, take home to yourself the question with which this chapter closes, "What will ye do in the end thereof?"

I am going to speak to you presently about those who go forth with Christ, without the camp, bearing his reproach, so let us read a few verses about the glory which awaits them by-and-by.

Revelation xxii. Verse 1. *And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

Infinite sovereignty bestows grace; the river of grace flows from the throne of God. It is the King who saves his people; yet the atonement is ever connected with the sovereignty: "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

2. *In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

God will enrich his Church by giving her a great variety of good things: "twelve manner of fruits." There shall also be a constancy and perpetuity about the supply of them, for this tree "yielded her fruit every month." And if there be ought of ill remaining anywhere in the world in those halcyon days, God shall supply a cure for it: "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of nations."

3. *And there shall be no more curse:*

The curse shall be taken from the soil on which it fell obliquely when God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." There shall be no curse upon man's body; there shall be nothing but blessing. Blessing shall swallow up the cursing, and God shall be manifest everywhere.

3. *But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:*

This is what we try to do now, but we shall more fully accomplish the blessed task in those brighter days which every revolution of the wheel of time is hastening on.

4. *And they shall see his face;*

Oh, that is glorious service,—to serve the Lord and to see his face at the same time! Communion and service are ever best when they are blended. There can be no fellowship better than that which serves, and no service sweeter than that of those who continue to see the face of their Master while they are serving him.

4. *And his name shall be in their foreheads.*

There will be no mistaking them; they shall bear in their foreheads the glorious name of God, just as the high priest of old had the words, "Holiness unto the Lord" upon his brow.

5. *And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun;—*

Even the sun is only worthy to be ranked with a candle in comparison with the light of God himself. John puts the two things in one sentence: "they need no candle, neither light of the sun;"—

5—7. *For the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus; come quickly! Amen.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A MARVELLOUS CHANGE

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 11TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, September 7th, 1882.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."—1 Corinthians vi. 9-11.

THE gospel is as holy as the law. The gospel is full of mercy to sinners, but it shows no mercy to sin. The gospel speaks most tenderly to the ungodly, but it speaks most sternly to ungodliness. There is a great difference made, in the New Testament, between the sinner and the sin; and while the sinner is, in infinite mercy, spared, encouraged to hope, and wooed by love almighty, the sin is denounced as a dreadful thing, an abominable thing, which God hates, and must punish.

Ah, dear friends! it is not from Sinai alone that we have need to shrink if we are lovers of sin; for, if we are resolved to keep on sinning, Calvary also condemns us; and, at last, even out of the lips of Jesus Christ himself, wilful sinners, continuing in their sin, shall hear the awful sentence, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Let no man say, when we proclaim God's message of mercy to the very chief of sinners, that, therefore, we think lightly of sin. No, it is because of the shedding of the precious blood of him whom we call Master and Lord, without whose agonizing death not a single sin could ever have been put away, that we are able freely to preach the mercy of God to those who truly repent of their transgressions; but, at the same time, we never hesitate to declare, in the plainest possible terms, that God will not spare the guilty ones who refuse to repent, for only through the blood of his dear Son will he have mercy upon the ungodly sons and daughters of men, who turn unto him, with full purpose of heart, trusting in the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The highest standard of holiness is set forth under the gospel. It does not come to cut down the requirements of the law, and to say, "You cannot keep the perfect law of the Lord; but do the best you can,

and that will suffice." There is nothing like that in the New Testament. It does not come to men, and say, in a tone of pity, "You are poor ignorant creatures, who have unwittingly fallen into sin, and therefore there is no guilt in your transgression of the law." Nothing of the kind; for even when our Saviour, on the cross, said, concerning his mockers and murderers, "they know not what they do," he prayed, "Father, forgive them," thereby plainly declaring that they were sinners, who needed to be forgiven, even though their transgression was also a sin of ignorance.

That is the short preface to the discourse I am now to deliver, which will be divided into three parts, the first of which will show us that we have here *a solemn sentence*,—a sentence shutting the guilty and unrepentant out of the kingdom of God. Then, secondly, here is *a reminder to some of us:* "and such were some of you." And, then, thirdly, here is *a change spoken of:* "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

I. Now, beloved, first of all, here is A SOLEMN SENTENCE: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" Oh, while I speak of it, I pray God, in infinite mercy, to carry home the words I say to any who are guilty of either or all the sins in this black and shameful list!

"Be not deceived: neither fornicators . . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God." That is the first set of sinners mentioned in this terrible catalogue, "fornicators"—men and women who have been guilty of unchastity with those who are unmarried. Not necessarily in the bonds of wedlock should we all be, but always in the bonds of purity; and those who sin against that which is pure, in their intercourse with one another, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Nothing could be more explicit than this inspired declaration of the apostle. If any persons live in lust and uncleanness, God will not permit them to defile his true Church on earth, or to profane his temple above. It is quite possible that I may be speaking to some people upon whose ears this message grates very harshly,—for all sorts of hearers come to this place,—and they will be the first to say, "The preacher should not mention such a subject." My answer to that remark is,—Then, you should not commit such iniquity, and give me cause to speak of it. As long as there are, in the world, sinners of this character, there must be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ faithful enough to pluck the velvet from their mouths, and to speak with the utmost plainness about them and to them. Let there be no mistake concerning this matter, you cannot be Christians if you thus defile yourselves; you cannot be children of God and live in filthy sin; it must not—it cannot be, and God here, by the pen of the apostle Paul, excommunicates all who pretend to be members of his Church, and yet are guilty of the sin of fornication.

Strange to say, in the very next place stands idolatry, that is, the worshipping of any god other than the true and living Jehovah, the God of the whole earth. All through the Old Testament, the Lord calls this sin of idolatry by the name of fornication, because it is the turning away of that love which ought to be fixed upon the one

and only God, and giving it to those that are no gods, and so defiling the heart, and sinning against God. "Oh!" says one, "there are no idolaters here." I greatly fear that there are, for idolatry is not merely the worship of images made of stone, or wood, or gods of gold, or crucifixes, or pictures of the Virgin Mary,—though all that is idolatry;—but it is also the worship of that dear child, you have at home, of whom you make an idol, or it is the worship of the Queen's image on gold and silver pieces by those who live only to amass worldly wealth, or it may be even the worship of yourself. The apostle tells us of a very low form of idolatry when he writes concerning those "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." There are far too many of such idolaters as these still about, all around us, and our text declares that they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

As to adulterers, whom the apostle next mentions, I need not say much; but, alas! there are still many such sinners, and they are found not only among the poor, but perhaps even more among those who can afford to pay for divorces, and dispensations, and indulgences to vice. Oh, horrible and terrible in this country, as well as in other lands, is the prevalence of this filthy sin! If there be any persons here who have made a profession of religion, and yet who have fallen into this guilt and crime of adultery, let me read this solemn sentence of my text to you, without mincing matters in the least, or toning down the severity of the inspired language, you "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Unless you hate and abhor this shameful sin, and flee from it, as from a poisonous serpent, you can never come into that kingdom where Christ is; neither in the kingdom of his grace, nor yet in the kingdom of his glory, can you ever have any inheritance, for, as Dr. Watts sings,—

"Pure are the joys above the sky,
And all the region peace;
No wanton lip nor envious eye
Can see or taste the bliss.

"Those holy gates for ever bar
Pollution, sin, and shame;
None shall obtain admittance there
But followers of the Lamb."

I dare not explain to you what is meant by the next expression used by the apostle: "nor effeminate;" but, alas! alas! there are still to be found all too many who are altogether given up to sinful practices, and who go from one form of vice to another, secretly ruining themselves both in body and in soul, for time and for eternity. These also are amongst those who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." So are those whom the apostle next describes: "nor abusers of themselves with mankind." Would God that this accursed vice had been swept off the face of the earth, as God did sweep it away when he rained brimstone and fire from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and destroyed the guilty inhabitants of the cities of the plain!

Next to these great sinners, whom the apostle mentions, come "thieves." There are still far too many of them in the world;—not merely those who are brought before the magistrates for having broken

into a house, or having robbed a person in the street, but those who steal little things, peculators, servants in the house who take what is not their own, and men who do dishonest things in trade, calling an article in their shop by a name that is not its proper description, and so cheating their customers, and getting their living by their knavery. These also are among those who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." You do not like to hear me talk about such matters; then, do not you continue to sin in this fashion. I shall cease to rebuke the sin when it has been abandoned; but, as long as such evils abound, it is my duty, as the servant of the living God, to declare plainly that the continuance in dishonest actions is not consistent with being in the kingdom of God's grace, and it will effectually close the gate of the kingdom of his glory. Dr. Watts was right when he wrote,—

"Not the malicious or profane,
The wanton or the proud,
Nor thieves, nor slanderers shall obtain
The kingdom of our God."

Then, next, the apostle says, "nor covetous." It is a strange thing that hardly anybody ever admits that he is covetous; such a person calls himself "Mr. Prudent Thrifty." Mr. Covetous tries to make us believe that he is only thrifty and prudent,—both excellent qualities which are not to be condemned;—but he really is greedy and grasping, which are quite different. He denies help to the poor, and help to the work of God; all he cares for is himself, that he may be rich. It is very significant that the covetous are put in the same list with fornicators and adulterers. Oh, dear! how quickly Mr. Covetous would move out of the seat if he thought that there were any such people as these about! But, my dear sir, you need not be so particular, or think so much of yourself, for, in the sight of God, you are in the same condition as they are, and you also are among those who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" unless you repent of your sin.

"Nor drunkards," says the apostle. We know that, in the church at Corinth, there were some who were so degraded that they were actually drunken at the Lord's table. We hope there are no professing Christians, nowadays, of so low a type as that; though we know that there are still some who have named the name of Christ, who are rightly called by that terrible name, "drunkards"; and we also know that, outside the nominal church, there are multitudes to whom that title belongs. Drunkenness is one of the most debasing of sins, it lowers the whole tone of the person who is held in bondage by it. We sometimes talk of a man being "as drunk as a beast," but whoever heard of a beast being drunk? Why, it is more beastly than anything a beast ever does. I do not believe that the devil himself is ever guilty of anything like that. I never heard even him charged with being drunk. It is a sin which has no sort of excuse; those who fall into it generally fall into other deadly vices. It is the devil's back-door to hell, and everything that is hellish; for he that once gives away his brains to drink, is ready to be caught by Satan for anything. Oh! but while the drunkard cannot have eternal life abiding in him while he is such, is it not a joy to

think of the many drunkards who have been washed and saved? This night, there are, sitting here, those who have done with their cups, who have left behind them their strong drink, and who have renounced the haunts of their debauchery. They are washed and cleansed, and when they think of the contrast between where they used to spend their evenings, and where they now are, they give echo to the question, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

After the drunkards, the apostle says, "nor revilers,"—those who gossip and slander, pulling other people's characters to pieces; or those who revile the saints and the things of God, profane swearers, who constantly add oaths to anything they have to say, those who cannot let the godly man's character alone;—all such as these "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And, alas! there are thousands and tens of thousands of them even in this so-called Christian country.

And, then, to close the black list, the apostle writes, "nor extortioners,"—the men who demand usurious interest, those who prey upon the poor while they pretend that they are going to be their helpers. They have a certain sum of money to lend, and they are willing to lend it out of pure benevolence; but, when any fall into their clutches, they pick their bones, and suck their blood, ere they have done with them. Woe unto the men who grind the poor, and rob another of anything that is justly his due! Of all these people, the apostle truly says that they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Nay, not merely does the apostle say it, but the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of his servant Paul,—he whose word is faithful and true,—he who knows what the truth is, declares that all such persons as these whom the apostle has been describing are not partakers of divine grace, they are not subjects of King Jesus, and into his glorious kingdom they can never come, except they repent of their sin, and turn unto the Lord with godly sorrow and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So much for that part of our subject. May God make these solemn and faithful words to be like arrows from the bow of a mighty man!

II. But, secondly, in our text we have also A REMINDER TO SOME OF US: "and such were some of you."

The apostle does not say, "and such were all of you;" and I thank God that I have not to say that to you, my hearers. Oh, what a mercy it is for any of us to have been kept from those terrible sins! Yet, with the apostle, I can say, "and such were some of you." Those vices and evils were so common in Corinth that it was a great glory to God that he had taken some of these people, who had formerly committed them, and had made Christians of them: "such were some of you."

Now, will you, dear friends, look at the first part of our text, and, as you run your eye down the black list, put your finger upon the points where you were guilty, and then say to yourself, "Yes, it is true, such was I, before the Lord saved me by his grace; that, or that, or that was my grievous offence against him." "Such were some of you." Then let me ask you, my brothers and sisters, to consider why it is that God is pleased to save some of the worst of sinners so that,

in the Church of Christ, it can always be said, "such were some of you."

First, *it illustrates the great power of the gospel.* If nobody were saved except the better sort of people, who have never openly offended, then the cavillers would say to us, "That is a very poor religion of yours; it is suitable for the moral, and the sober, and the chaste; but what good is it to a poor fallen world where there are so many real sinners of the blackest dye?" But the Lord seems to have said, "I will stretch out my hand, and I will save some of the very chief of sinners, in order that, throughout all time, it may be known that my gospel can effect the salvation of all sorts of sinners, even the most degraded. However depraved and fallen they may be, they cannot have gone beyond the reach of the gospel of my Son." Is not that a glorious fact? Oh! when I think of some of you big sinners, whom the Lord has saved under my ministry, I stand on this platform, and, with the utmost confidence, cry to the guiltiest sinners who may be present, "Come along with you, whoever you may be; I have a gospel that is just suited to you." I can say, "Come, you who are moral and refined, who have never gone into any gross sin; here is a gospel just suitable for you;" but I am glad also to be able to add, "Come along, you who have raked the very kennels of hell with your iniquities, here is that which can wash you, and make you white as the newly-fallen snow."

That, I believe, is one reason why the Lord saves these great sinners,—to glorify his gospel.

Next, he does it *to magnify his mercy,* for when, in great tenderness, he comes to look upon sin as a disease, then, the worse the disease, the more is his pity. I remember reading of one, who was giving some relief to a dumb man, and his companion said to him, "Why, he never asked anything of you!" "No," he answered, "but his dumb lips asked of me more eloquently than any man could have done by speaking." Look at the blind man: he cannot affect you with his eyes, for he has none; but it is the absence of his eyes that makes you stop, and say to him, "Poor blind man, I am so sorry for you, here's a trifle to help you." The crafty beggars in the streets will often show their sham sores and imitation wounds, in order to provoke your pity; but our great God, when he sees us really full of sin,—leprous, foul, corrupted,—then says, "Poor soul, I will have pity upon thee." It is in this way that he looks upon these greatly-diseased ones, and blesses some of them on purpose that the majesty of his mercy and the omnipotence of his grace may be plainly seen by the sons of men.

I am sure that he does it, also, *to confound self-righteousness.* I have heard this kind of remark again and again, "If God saves anybody, it ought to be those of us who always go to a place of worship, and listen so attentively to the preacher." Ah, yes, you proud sinner! I know what you think, but I must remind you that there is no sin worse than pride, and you are evidently full of it. "Oh, but!" says someone, "I have always been seeking and striving to be as good as ever I could, and yet I am not saved; but over there is a poor fallen girl, just rescued from the streets, who has believed in Christ, and is

now rejoicing in him." I can easily explain why you are not saved; it is because you say that you see, and therefore you prove that you are blind. You think you are righteous, and that thought is itself the very essence of unrighteousness. I pray you to notice how the Lord rebukes you, and to learn, from his rebuke, where your sin lies. He does, as it were, smite your pride on the cheek-bone, and he says, "Because you say that you do not need a Saviour, you shall not have a Saviour. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners unto repentance." Come down off your lofty pinnacle, Mr. Pharisee,—you who thank God that you are not as other men are. Stand side by side with the poor publican whom you have despised, and cry, as he does, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and then see if God will not deal in mercy with you also.

I am sure, too, that God saves some of these very black sinners on purpose *to encourage the preachers of his gospel.* I will tell you a secret. We, ministers, are often a very faint-hearted set of men, and if we do not have a great many converts, we go crying to our Master, "Who hath believed our report?" and, while we are doing it, in comes one who has been a drunkard, or an unchaste person, or a thief, and we hear what God has done for him by our poor feeble ministry, and we shake his hand. Then he cries, and we cry; and we do not know which is the bigger sinner of the two,—he for his open iniquity, or we for our unbelief. I know that, when I meet with such converts, I say, "Bless God for them! When I get into the pulpit again, I will give the people some more of that same gospel, for I see that, what it has done for them, it can do for others." Oh, yes! they may empty the prisons, if they like to do so, and let all the criminals in them come to hear the gospel. We have a Christ to preach who is more than a match for the very worst of them; and even if there should come one, whose heart had been turned into thrice-hardened steel, this gospel would be able to melt it; and, behind it, there is the Christ who can take the hard heart away, and give in its place the heart of flesh, full of tenderness, and full of love to himself and to saints and sinners, too. Oh, yes! God often encourages his servants by fetching out from among the ungodly some of these great black sinners, washing them whiter than snow in the precious blood of Jesus, and bringing them into his kingdom on earth, in anticipation of the time when they shall be received into his kingdom above.

Further, by this means, he also *encourages other great sinners to come to him.* I have known a man who said, "I fear that I cannot be saved, for I have been such a terribly great sinner;" but, one day, he has met one of his old companions, who used to swear, and drink, and lie, and finding him to be saved, he says to himself, "Oh, then! I also might be saved." I once knew a poor fellow, who was very much distressed in spirit, because he thought there was no pardon that could ever come to him; but he went into a chapel, one morning, when a little prayer-meeting was being held before the service, and there was a certain old sea-captain praying with such a tremendous voice that the man thought, "I must surely have seen and heard that man somewhere else." When the prayer was ended, and he saw the man's face, he said to himself, "Why! that is Captain So-and-so.

Six months ago, my very blood ran cold as I listened to his blasphemy; I never heard a man swear as he did, and I never before heard a man pray as he now does;" and then he added, "God can save me now that he has saved him, for I am sure that, great sinner as I have been, I never went his length in blaspheming my Maker." There was good ground for that man's conclusion, and many other people have argued in a similar fashion. It has frequently been the case that the big sinner has become a kind of decoy duck. He is caught first in the blessed gospel net, and then he allures others to come in with him. Very often, those who had not the courage to go to Jesus before, say, when they see how he welcomes some out-and-out profligate, "Well, as he has received him, why should he not also receive me?" You know how Bunyan relates that, when he was converted, and began to preach, people said, "What! is that tinker saved?" and they gathered together to hear what he had to say, and then he preached to them Jesus the Saviour, and there were more tinkers that got tinkered that day; nay, not tinkered, but made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Christ finds it easier work to make us anew than to mend us, and that is what we really need to have done to us. If any of you are thinking of being mended to-night by signing the pledge,*—well, I am glad to see old kettles repaired; but, for all that, I would rather that you were made new kettles altogether. That is to say, I pray God to take you in hand, and make you new creatures in Christ Jesus, for that is what we are aiming at in all these Gospel Temperance services, and we shall not be satisfied unless that great work is accomplished.

I want to tell you one thing more about the salvation of these great sinners. I believe that the Lord saves them in order *that he may win from them great love, and intense zeal, and much earnestness.* If a man, with a cut finger, calls on a doctor, the surgeon says, "Oh, yes; I see! Put this piece of plaister on, and it will be all right in a day or two," and so it is. He had not much the matter with him, so there was not much to be said when his finger was healed. But here is a man who can hardly breathe; he is on the very borders of the grave, he will be dead in a week unless something extraordinary happens to him. He has been to scores of doctors, and they all say, "It is no good to give you any medicine, for nothing will ever cure you; and you will soon die." But he hears of a physician who has been the means of healing other sick folk in just such a plight as his. He calls him in, and the doctor says to him, "If you take this remedy, you will recover;" and so he does. In a month's time, that man is walking about, breathing the fresh air, and he is soon going to his work again. Will he talk about the wonderful physician who cured him? Won't he talk about him? Why! there is no stopping him when once he begins on that topic. To every friend whom he meets, he says, "Do you see what a difference there is in me? You know how my bones were almost sticking through my skin. It was as much as ever I could do to keep on breathing; but just look at me now, I have every hope of living on, perhaps for twenty or thirty years more." Possibly, a

* This discourse was delivered at the service, in the Tabernacle, which was followed by a public meeting in connection with the Gospel Temperance Mission held there in September, 1882.

man, who is suffering from neuralgia, comes to see him, and he says, "I am not sure whether my doctor treats such a slight ailment as that; I almost wish you were in a consumption like mine was, for he would cure you as he healed me."

Is it not so with regard to the diseases of the body, and gratitude to the man who cures them? Well, in like manner, when the Lord saves a great big sinner, oh, how that sinner will love him, and how he will talk about him to other sinners! There is a common saying, among game preservers, that an old poacher makes the best game-keeper; he is the man to catch all other poachers when they come, for he knows, from his own experience, all their ways. "Set a thief to catch a thief," is a similar proverbial expression which teaches the same lesson. A woman, who has been brought up, out of great sin, into the paths of virtue and honour, is the one who will rejoice in rescuing others from a life of sin and shame. If you find a man who has been permitted to know the depths of sin, he is the one who will delight to go and seek after those who are sinking in the terrible flood. In the providence of God, I was never allowed to plunge into gross open sin, yet the Lord made me to feel myself to be the worst sinner who ever lived. I had such a vivid realization of my own guilt that I thought there never was another individual who had broken God's law as I had; and when he pardoned me, I felt that there was no one who owed more to him than I did. People say that I preached Calvinistic doctrine from the very first. I know I preached free grace, and that I must proclaim till I die, for I should have been damned in hell, years ago, if it had not been for the freest, richest, and mightiest grace that ever came from the heart of God. And, oh! I do love to tell you big black sinners that he can forgive your grossest sin, and cleanse you from your worst wickedness,—that he waits to do this for all who will come and put their trust in his dear Son, and that very trust he gives them by the effectual working of his Spirit. Salvation is all of grace from first to last; and, as it is all of grace, the greater the sinner who is saved by it, the more glory to the grace that saves him.

III. My time has gone, but I must say just a little about the third point, that is, THE MARVELLOUS CHANGE.

Oh, that I knew how to preach upon this theme! I never feel my own weakness so much as when I stand here to plead with unconverted men to yield to the Saviour. If any man thinks that he can preach, let him come and try it, if by preaching he means affecting the hearts of men, and bringing them to God. This must be the work of the Holy Spirit; and, whatever we may do, nothing comes of it until he works the great miracle. We go back home, and say, "Who hath believed our report?" until the arm of the Lord is revealed; and then men are saved. Now, turning to this last part of our text:—"and such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God;"—I will endeavour briefly to set all these things before you as best I can; the Lord knows how much better I would do it if it were in my power to do

it. But, after all, it is not my language which is the important matter, it is the power of the truth I utter on which I rest; nor yet even upon that, but on the wonder-working Spirit of God, who can effectually apply that truth to the heart, and make it anew by his omnipotent grace.

"Come, Holy Ghost, (for, moved by thee,
The prophets wrote and spoke,)
Unlock the truth, thyself the key,
Unseal the sacred Book.

"God, through himself, we then shall know,
If thou within us shine;
And sound, with all thy saints below,
The depths of love divine."

"And such were some of you." Where are you,—dear members of this church, or of other churches,—of whom this is true, "and such were some of you"? "But ye are washed." The High Churchman says that this means baptism: does it? I have seen some people washed by baptism;—I do not mean sprinkled, for I never could see how anyone could be washed in that way;—but when we have immersed them, this I know,—that an unregenerate person, even after immersion, is unregenerate still; and that a man, who is not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ before he is baptized, has need to be baptized again, for it is not really Scriptural baptism to him, and it cannot be a means of blessing to him. It may be a piece of hypocrisy on his part, and of no value to those who practise it. No, no; that is not the washing of which Paul writes; and baptism, repeated ten thousand times, can do you no good whatever unless, first of all, you are washed in another fountain of which we often sing. Let us sing about it now, all of us who know the verse,—

"There is a fountain fill'd with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains." *

That is the washing of which the apostle says, "but ye are washed;" and after that washing, comes the sanctifying, that is, the changing of the heart, and the making of the whole nature holy; and that is the work of the Spirit of God, by the application of the Word of Christ.

And then follows the justification. Pardon washes away our sin; justification makes us righteous in the sight of God; and sanctification gives us true holiness. Justification gives us imputed holiness, so that we stand before God, first in the righteousness which Christ has wrought out for us, and next in the righteousness which the Spirit of God has wrought in us. Oh, what a marvellous change is wrought as the result of that one act of blessed washing!

Now, to close, let me say that, if ye would be saved, this is the one thing for you to do, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not trust in anything else whatever, but rely alone upon him. Trust in Christ to make you hate sin. Trust in Christ to enable you to overcome

* This verse was accordingly sung by the congregation, and then MR. SPURGEON resumed and concluded his discourse.

every bad habit. Trust in Christ to help you to do everything that is right. Trust in Christ to cause you to stand fast even till you get to heaven. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;"—not, "he shall be saved to-morrow, or ten years hence;"—he is saved now, on the spot. If you have only trusted in Christ since last that clock ticked, you are forgiven, you are a child of God, you are accepted in the Beloved, you are saved. It is an instantaneous, an immediate, but a perfect work,—this washing away of sin, and this giving to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Lord grant it to each one of you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

1 CORINTHIANS VI. 1—14.

Verse 1. *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?*

In those days, the courts of law were utterly unjust. It was all a matter of who could bribe the most, for he would gain the suit. I think that we cannot say that it is quite like this at the present time in our law courts, neither can this verse be strictly a rule for the guidance of men in these days, except that, in the spirit of Paul's words, all lawsuits among Christians should be avoided if possible.

2, 3. *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*

Sitting with Christ, at the last great day of judgment, we shall give our "Amen" to the condemnation of the fallen spirits.

3, 4. *How much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.*

For they will be better judges than the best of worldly men. Do you set such people to judge your difficult matters? And if you do not, then why do you go to those who are even worse fitted to give a right decision?

5—11. *I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you:*

They were Corinthians, and some of them had fallen into the same sad and shameful condition as the rest of the inhabitants of Corinth. Many of them had been fetched, by almighty grace, out of the very depths of the grossest sin, so that Paul, after giving a list of the blackest sinners, could add, "and such were some of you."

11, 12. *But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient:*

There are some things that I may do; that is, I have the liberty to do them if I please; but I must also consider whether they are expedient, or

whether they will damage others, and do mischief to them; for, if so, it will be better for me not to do them, because they are not expedient, even though they are lawful.

12, 13. *All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them.*

So, on the one hand, do not make too much of abstaining from this or that, for these things, after all, are but small matters to glory in; but, on the other hand, let no man ever call himself a Christian while he is a slave to any evil habit. What says Paul? "God shall destroy both it and them." In the previous verse, he says, "I will not be brought under the power of any." The immortal spirit under the power of materialism? Nay, that must never be.

13, 14. *Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.*

Our bodies belong to him; therefore, let us think highly of them, and never do anything to injure them; and, especially, let us take care never to let them become instruments of iniquity to the grieving of the blessed Spirit of God.

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SOME MARKS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 18TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, September 10th, 1882.

"Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us."—Psalm lxviii. 28.

DEAR friends, at this time there is a special stir among the people. I know, from what I have seen and heard, that many are beginning to seek the Lord; and others, who are not yet actually turning unto the Lord, are at least resolved to break off certain grosser sins, and seek after something better. Well, there is something to be thankful for even in the gripes of hunger which the prodigal feels before he says, "I will arise and go to my Father;" I value even the pangs he has to endure when he fain would fill his belly with the husks that the swine eat. Before we can pronounce anyone's experience to be a proof of the working of God's grace, we are glad if we see any signs of what usually comes when grace enters the heart. So I am thankful when an ungodly man says, "It is time I changed my course;" for I trust that this is the first chipping upon the marble block, and that the great Sculptor, who fashions us in his own glorious image, will carry on the work, and complete it to his own praise.

Just now, when I see these signs of a stir among the people, I think it is my business to repeat the exhortation I have often given, "Make sure work of the change you are contemplating; make sure work for eternity. Do not put up with anything that will fail you at the last. If you are looking out for something better than you already possess, mind that you get the best that is to be had." Nay, more, I would bid you give heed to our Lord's own words, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Mind that you buy all these things of Christ, for the terms on which you may have them are "without money and without price," and you cannot get them anywhere else. I hope I am now addressing some who are saying, "We shall be glad and grateful if you will help us to judge as to our true condition, and

aid us to see whether we are Christians or not." That is what I am going to try to do to-night.

The verse before my text describes God's ancient people when they were assembled in the order of their tribes: "There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali." They belonged to various tribes of the children of Israel, but they were all numbered among the Lord's people; and it is said of the whole of them, as if they were but one, "Thy God hath commanded thy strength." These words apply to all the armies of Israel; so you and I, dear friends, had better consider and see whether we belong to his armies or not.

I. From our text, I learn that the first mark of the people of God is, that THE LORD IS THEIR GOD.

Notice the first two words: "Thy God." This proves that they have a God. We cannot be God's people unless we know his name, and know that he is the living and true God, and that all the rest of the so-called gods are but fictions or idols of the heathen. There is one God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is. There is one God, who has made us, and from whom the breath in our nostrils has come. There is one God who has ruled in all past history, and who still is the God of providence, the Preserver, and Director of his chosen people, the one God who, in the fulness of time, sent his only-begotten Son, who was equal with himself, but who lived and died that the guilty sons of men might have their sins pardoned, and their wandering feet directed back to the great Father's house. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

First, *God's people believe in this God.* If any do not believe in him, they may call themselves what they please, but they are not the people of the living God. They may be the people of philosophy; they may be the people of the many dreams which men dream, nowadays, instead of believing in God; but they are not his people. I hope, beloved, that we have no question about this matter, and that we can say, without the slightest hesitation, "Yes, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God."

He becomes our God, then, first, by our belief in him, and, next, *by our reliance upon him.* This God is not merely an influence; certainly, he is not a fiction. He is a real Person, with whom we may speak, and who will hear us, and answer us according to his wisdom and goodness. The apostle truly wrote, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;" and he is speaking to us still, through him, words of grace, and love, and kindness. And he becomes our God, I repeat, when, believing in him, we come and rely upon him; implicitly trusting him, that, seeing we are sinful, he may cleanse us,—that, seeing we are ignorant, he may teach us,—that, seeing we are feeble, we may lay hold upon his strength, and may thereby be preserved unto everlasting life.

Let me ask all of you whom I am addressing,—Are you trusting

the living God? You know what it is, as a child, to trust your parent,—as a friend, to trust a friend; are you dealing just in that way with God? Then, are you relying upon him, depending upon him,—especially relying upon him as he is revealed in Jesus Christ his Son, the sin-atoning Saviour? If you are, you are his people. If you are not,—whatever you may do, or be, or say, or think,—you are not numbered among the people of God. Faith is the distinguishing mark of his elect. Where it is present, there is grace and truth. Where it is absent, the soul is dead in trespasses and sins.

How does God yet further become my God? *By my love to him.* As the result of having trusted him, I find myself peaceful, happy, restful; I receive at his hands pardon, and I know it is mine; I get from him love, and I feel it; and I love him in return. This is another of the marks of the Lord's people. The true child of God loves God. There are many men who are, to a certain extent, religious, because they feel bound to be so by a law which they cannot resist. Ah! but we are not under law; we are under grace, and we obey the commands of God because we love to do so. No man, who takes pleasure in sin, is a child of God, for the new nature hates sin; and though, alas! through the influence of the old nature which still remains within us, we are imperfect, and often transgress the law of the Lord, yet it is not our delight, and we grieve that it should ever be the case with us. If a child of God falls into sin, he is like a sheep in the mire, up again directly; but he who is still ungodly is like the sow that falls in the mud, and wallows in it, for he is in his element, and he delights in it.

There is a very important thing to be observed in connection with this point; that is, that our love to God is one of the chief qualifications for serving him acceptably. He who serves God, out of love to him, is the one who really and truly serves him. The Lord of love, the great King eternal, immortal, invisible, needs no slaves to grace his throne. He wants those to do his bidding who serve him with delight and pleasure. There is such a thing as self-denial ceasing to be self-denial, when a man takes such pleasure in denying himself, for Christ's sake, that the self-denial is a greater source of joy to him than the indulgence would have been; and that is just what true service for God is. Have I come here to-night because I am paid to do it? Or do I preach the gospel with regret and loathing? Ah, no! The gospel is as much my element as the sea is the element of the fish. What could I preach beside? Silent be this tongue for ever sooner than I should have aught to teach concerning the way of salvation save Jesus Christ and him crucified, and his mighty mercy received by faith. Do not many of you, beloved, feel just the same as I do? We know that we are children of God, and that he is our God, because we love him; and that love has put a new mainspring within us, which moves our hands, and all the wheels of our nature as they ought to be moved.

How, next, does he become our God still more clearly? *By our avowal of him,* when we come forward, and say, "Let others do what they will, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,"—when we say, "God has set forth his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Saviour

of sinners, we accept him as our Saviour, and with our mouth we confess that we have done so. Let men hear it, let angels hear it, let devils hear it, it matters not to us how many hear our confession that we are set apart for God and for his Christ." Our Christian profession is not a profession of perfection. Nay, nay; it is not a profession that we are, in and of ourselves, any better than other people; but it means that we have believed in Jesus Christ unto the renewal of our nature and the salvation of our souls. He who has had that great work of grace done in him and for him ought to say,—and say at once,—"This God is my God for ever and ever; he shall be my guide even unto death." Let us be branded with the name of God. Let us, beloved, who have believed in Jesus, be God's men, and God's alone; and on all suitable occasions let us confess the blessed impeachment that we are not our own, for we are "bought with a price,"—that price being more than we can ever calculate, even the precious blood of Jesus, God's dear Son.

Genuine people of God, then, have the Lord to be their God, according to the first two words of our text, "Thy God." And, oh! beloved, I have scarcely time to tell you in what a sweet way we get *personal possession of God*. After having trusted him, and relied upon him, and loved him, and confessed that we belong to him, we get to be as conscious of his presence as we are of the air we breathe. We are able freely to converse with him, and feel within our spirit that he is listening to what we say to him, and that he is speaking back to us. "Oh!" says someone, "I do not believe that is possible." Friend, you may do as you like about believing what I say; but, at any rate, if you have never enjoyed this experience, that does not prove that there is no such thing. We are as honest as you are, and we have as much right to be believed as you have. If we were before a jury, we should be as good witnesses as ever you would be. We are not liars, and we do solemnly declare that God's presence is so consciously realized by us that we are certain that "in him we live, and move, and have our being," and that spiritual communications—communications from the Holy Spirit—are frequent with us, checking us when we might fall into sin, stimulating us when we would be laggard, enlightening us when we are in difficulty, and sometimes bearing us upward, as on eagles' wings, till we seem to get into the very vestibule of heaven, and could scarcely be happier than we are, or else, methinks, we must die. Oh, yes! there is a God, we who believe in Jesus have this God as ours, and we will rejoice in him.

That, then, is the first mark of the Lord's people, the Lord is their God.

II. A second mark of the Lord's people is given in our text; read the whole of the first sentence, and you will see that he who feels that God has called upon him to serve him with all his strength is one of the Lord's servants: "Thy God hath commanded thy strength." That is to say, ALL THE STRENGTH OF A CHRISTIAN—physically, mentally, morally, spiritually,—IS AT GOD'S DISPOSAL.

A true Christian owns that all he has, and the best of all that he has, should always be consecrated and dedicated to his Lord. First, *we are heartily to obey God's commands*. There is no part of our

strength that we may reserve for ourselves, it all belongs to our Lord. We are to be like a soldier, who, when he goes to the war, thinks of nothing but how he shall discharge his duties so as to please his commanding officer. Now, my dear hearer, is that the case with thee? Has God commanded thy strength? "Well, sir, I go to church; I go to chapel; I profess to be a Christian." Yes, yes, yes, but there may be nothing in all that; has God the absolute and sole command of you? Is he your Commander-in-chief? Has he come and taken possession of that strong will of yours, and made it subject to his will? And if he has made you to be a man strong in faith, fervent in love, brave in holy daring, and great in patience, do you desire to have all those forces used for his glory, and his glory alone? If not, you are not one of God's people; but, if you do hold all your powers at his disposal, that is one of the marks of his people; and the more clear it is, the better. Beloved, God is to be served by us with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul, and with all our strength.

After this fashion, also, *we should pray to him fervently.* Oh, what poor prayers some people pray, when they bow their heads for a moment as they come into the house of God! Often, there is no prayer at all in it; and it is the same when they kneel down by their bedside, nearly asleep, or when they get up in the morning rather late, and the bell is ringing for breakfast, and they hurry down; yet they call that prayer. Listen to the text, my friend: "Thy God hath commanded thy strength." Take the pick of the day for prayer if you can. If you are half asleep at other things, be wide awake then. It is the best time for trading that you ever have; see that you make good use of it. This is the noblest exercise, except one, in which you can be engaged; get all the good that you can out of it. When you go up to the mount, like Elias on the top of Carmel, bring all the powers of your heart, and mind, and soul, to bear upon this privileged occupation, and cry mightily unto God. Half-hearted prayers ask for a denial, and usually get it. Pray as if you meant to be heard. Pray as he, who is starving, asks for bread, or for a drink of water if he is dying of thirst. Plead as he does who pleads for his life, for this is the way to prevail with God. Effectual fervent prayers bombard the gates of pearl, and the kingdom of heaven is carried by the violence of that importunity which will not take a denial. "Thy God hath commanded thy strength." Oh, for more of this kind of prayer!

And the same strength ought to go out *when we praise God.* Never ought our heart to be more energetic than when we say, "Blessed be his holy name!" And when we are singing in company with others, then also should we praise the Lord with joyous heartiness. I love to hear the bright, gladsome songs of people who really sing with their souls as well as with their voices. I have been in some congregations where, during the hymns, I have thought I needed a microphone to enable me to hear what they were singing, for they sang so very softly. Pull out the stops of your organ, and let the music fly abroad, for "thy God hath commanded thy strength."

In a similar fashion, we should *labour for the Lord earnestly.* In

the great warfare which we have now to wage against the world, the flesh, and the devil, let us give to God the whole of our strength. Some people are said to work so hard for Christ that they wear themselves out. What a blessed consummation that must be! To wear ourselves away in our Master's service, to let the zeal of God's house eat us up, is the very best thing that can happen to us. I am sorry to say that I do not meet with many people who are too zealous. Some are so, because they have not much brain, and what little they have easily catches fire. Very well, my brother, if that is your case, burn away. There are some, however, who have more brains, but they seem to keep them very damp, so they never get thoroughly alight; but he who serves God aright should burn if he does not blaze, though it is better to be a burning and a shining light, as John the Baptist was. There should be a red, ruby-like heat in the very centre of our soul. If there are no sparks and flames, yet should our heart be on fire for God. God never meant us to do his work half-heartedly; but he does wish each of his people to feel and say, "My God hath commanded my strength, and he shall have it."

And, lastly under this head, let us give God our strength by *living wholly to him in our ordinary life.* It is a great mistake to make a division between that which is "sacred" and that which is "secular" in a Christian's life. You are not only to serve God when you worship him in the Tabernacle or in some other house of prayer; you are equally to serve him to-morrow morning when you take the shutters down from your shop-windows. Pray to God, as you do so, "O Lord, take my shutters down, and enlighten my darkness! I know that, this day, I cannot prosper without thy blessing. I mean to work hard at my business; but it is vain to rise early, and to sit up late, unless thou dost bless my effort. Lord, be with thy servant all the day long!" Here comes the first customer. Now pray the Lord that you may not say anything to him but what is right, and ask God to give you an opportunity of saying a good word to him about the Lord Jesus Christ. Here come half a dozen customers all at once; now, you young men, pray the Lord to enable you to attend to your business as you ought to do it so as really to serve those who employ you; "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart," even while you are serving your earthly employer. All the day long, there are opportunities for glorifying God if a man really wishes to do it. If the Spirit of God be with you all the day, you will feel, and say to yourself, "I will give to God all my strength. These things down here—this measuring out, either by yards or by bushels,—this buying and this selling,—must be done by somebody; and I must, by some means, earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, or the sweat of my brain; and as this is what God has given me to do, I will do it thoroughly, with a single eye to his glory, so that no one shall ever be able truthfully to say that Christianity makes me, in any respect, a worse man than I was before I knew the Lord." "Thy God hath commanded thy strength;" so live unto God in everything. Let your meals be sacraments, let your garments be vestments, let your

common utterances be a part of a great life-psalm, and let your whole being be as a burnt-offering ascending unto the Most High, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Oh, for the power of the Spirit of God to help you to do this!

III. The next part of the verse will show you, dear friends, that God's people are known by this sign, THEY ASCRIBE TO HIM ALL THAT IS GOOD IN THEM, AND IN THEIR FELLOW-MEN. Let me read you the latter part of the text: "Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought in us."

This applies, first, to *the steps which lead to conversion:* "That which THOU hast wrought for us." There is no prayer here about what we have wrought for ourselves, for that is all mischief and evil, which needs to be forgiven and undone. The sooner all that nature spins is unravelled, the better. What God works is worth having wrought for us and in us. There are some people who have very crude and false ideas about what the work of grace is in the soul. I heard one say that the sinner is to take the first step towards salvation, and then God will do the rest; but I have often said, and now say it again, that the first step is the one point of difficulty. You know the French story about Saint Denis, whose head was cut off, and then it was said that he picked it up, and carried it in his hands for a thousand miles. That was what the priests of the Church of Rome declared; but one of Voltaire's followers very wittily remarked that, as for the thousand miles, there was no difficulty in that; it was only the first step that had any difficulty in it. If the saint could manage that part, the rest would be easy enough; and it is just so in the matter of salvation. If the dead man can pick his own head up,—if the dead sinner can make himself alive,—why, then he can do very well without God all the rest of the way to heaven. But that can never be, for Jesus Christ is Alpha as well as Omega, the first as well as the last in the sinner's salvation; and we may constantly say to him,—

> **"No sinner can be beforehand with thee;**
> **Thy grace is most sovereign, most rich, and most free."**

Nay, further, not only does God begin it, but *it is he who carries it on.* If ever the work of grace were to stop at a certain point, and the rest of it were to be the work of nature, that linsey-woolsey garment would be unfit for a child of God to wear. Ay, and what is more, the work, which God has begun, *he must finish, too.* If he has left anything to our unaided strength, we shall fail in that particular point, and all of it will become faulty and useless. The true people of God are resting, for the whole of their salvation, upon the Triune Jehovah,—upon the Father's love, upon the Son's redemption, and upon the Spirit's effectual work upon the heart and conscience. It must be all of God, and all of grace, from the first even to the last; and they are the true people of God who feel and know this.

Let me speak to some of you who have been taking the pledge lately. That is a very right thing to do; I wish that all did it, but that will not save you. The salvation of the soul is God's work, and you must come to him for it. "But, supposing I abstain for the

future, will not all be right?" Certainly not; what about the times when you have been drunk? "Oh, well, of course, the pledge will not wipe out that sin." No, it will not. If you are a thief, would you tell the magistrates that they must not punish you because you are not going to thieve again? "No," they would say, "we must punish you for what you have done." There are all your past sins, and only the Lord Jesus Christ can blot them out. Perhaps a man says, "But, if I abstain from sin in the future, will not that do?" No; it will not. You owe your grocer a long bill, do you not? Call upon him, and tell him that you cannot pay a halfpenny of the debt, but that you are not going to get into debt any more. "Oh!" says he, "but that will not do for me; there is a County Court somewhere, and I shall get a summons for you to appear there." So, if you go to God, and say, "I am not going to sin in this way any more," he will not believe you; but if he did, he would say, "What about the past?" "God requireth that which is past." There is the stain of your past sin upon you; how can that be removed? Not by your tears; if you could shed an Atlantic full of tears, yet might the red spot of your sin turn every wave to carmine, and the fatal spot would be upon you still. Nothing but the blood of Jesus can wash you clean; and none are God's people but those who know that, and who come to him for salvation, and cleansing, and everything; and who commit themselves, body, soul, and spirit, unto him.

IV. Now, lastly, the fourth mark of God's people is that THEY PRAY TO HIM FOR THEIR STABILITY: "Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us."

What is a man's strength? Some think that their strength lies in their resolution. "Now," says one, "I have said it, and I will keep to it. You know, I am not a man who is easily turned from his purpose; I have made up my mind, and I will do it." Yes, I have known several who have made up their mind, but it did not come to much when they had made it up. And I have known a great many persons promise, and having done that half a dozen times before, and broken their promise every time, it did not come to much when that was done. "Oh!" says one, "do not think that I shall act like that; I pledge myself to act differently." Yes, yes; and when a man has not a halfpenny in his pocket, and he pledges himself that he will be a millionaire, I think to myself, "All right, but he had better not begin spending any of it yet."

A soldier puts on his harness to go out to fight,—he has his helmet on his head, and greaves of brass on his legs, and a breastplate, and all the rest of the armour. "Am I not a brave fellow?" he asks. When you come back, you may be; but not just yet. Remember Ahab's message to Ben-hadad, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." I believe in you, my dear friend; you have made a promise, and I believe that you will keep your promise. That is to say, I believe as much in you as I do in the majority of people. "How much is that?" you ask. Well, not too much, for I have seen too many men to place much reliance upon them. I have not yet been fifty years among them, but there are several of them whom I would only trust as far

as I could see them; there are some whom I would not trust as far as that; and there are others whom I thought I might trust out of my sight, and I have done so,—and I have got bitten by them. I believe myself bound to give as much credence and confidence to your resolution as your resolution is worth, so please let me see how much it is worth by observing how you go on.

"Oh!" says one, "but there is an addition to my resolution; there is my past experience. I am an experienced person; I am not like your young chits who are apt to be easily led astray again. 'A burnt child dreads the fire.' My experience has made me very careful, and steady, and reliable." Yes, I know; you are the man whom I would not trust with a bad farthing, because the very people who have demanded my trust on the ground that they could not be led astray, I have generally found were the men who had already gone far astray. I knew an old friend, who used to attend here, and who was a very curious sort of man, but he had a great deal of common sense. A deacon of a church met him in Smithfield, one morning, and asked him for a loan of fifty pounds. He was going to say, "Yes," for he knew and trusted him; but the deacon said to him, "Robert, you know you can safely lend that amount to me. I shall be sure to let you have it on the day that I promise; at my time of life, I am quite past temptation." My old friend stopped, and said, "I was going to let you have that fifty pounds; but, as you have arrived at that point, I shall not lend you a halfpenny, for I am quite certain I should never see it again." At that very moment, the man knew that he was utterly bankrupt, and he failed, shortly after, for a very large sum, too, yet he said, "You may safely lend it to me, for I am quite past temptation." "Well," says one, "then you would not have us believe in one another." No, unless you want to believe a lie. David said, "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." "You are not very complimentary." No; if you want compliments, do not come here, for I do not deal in them, and I do not intend to. God's Word is what I have to preach, and that contains something better than compliments. Brethren and sisters, your best resolutions and your best experience are as strong as a broken reed. They only want to be touched in a certain way, and they will break again. You have already failed again and again; it is no use for you to start again as you started then, for you will fail again. The same causes, under the same circumstances, will produce the same results.

Now stop, my friend, while I get a grip of your hand, and say, "Come, let us pray together," and this shall be our prayer, "Lord, if thou hast wrought any good in us, however little it is, we dare not trust to it, or trust ourselves with it; but, Lord, do thou strengthen it. If it is only just a consciousness of sin, Lord, strengthen it till it grows into repentance. If it is only a little trembling desire to be right, Lord, strengthen it into a firm and brave resolve. If it is but a little hope in Christ, Lord, strengthen it until I can say, 'I know whom I have believed.' If I have a little germ of faith, Lord, strengthen it till the mustard seed grows into a tree. O Lord, I have promised to do this and that, but I know that I am as weak as

water; I am apt to slip when I feel that I am standing most safely. Lord, help me; Lord, help me; lend me thy strength!" Some of you have lately taken the pledge: "I promise, by the help of God, to abstain." That is the thing for you, that "help of God" is what you need. I do entreat any of you who are starting on a fresh life, do not start without the help of God. Do not attempt to go on without the help of God. And you, dear friends, who are far advanced in the Christian life, never be so besotted as to think that you have gone so far by God's aid, and now you can traverse the rest of the road without him. You cannot do anything in that way. Have you never noticed that we make our worst blunders over the plainest things? The children of Israel were commanded to slay all the Canaanites, but a company of Gibeonites disguised themselves in a very clever fashion, so the people said, "Their shoes are old and clouted, and their clothes—well, they must have come a long way, for they are dreadfully worn. These men look like travellers who have come from a very far-distant country." They did not make enquiries, for they said, "These are strangers, that is quite evident; so let us make a covenant with them, and let their lives be spared;" yet, all the while, these men were their next-door neighbours, living just close to them. On the plainest point, the Israelites were taken in, and it is often the same with us.

Brethren, never trust in yourselves, even though your strength seems to be more than adequate for the occasion. Trust in God as much when you have a huge "Woolwich infant" to fire against your enemy as if you had nothing but a sling and a stone. When you are full of knowledge, and full of wisdom, and full of grace, yet still be nothing, and let the Lord your God be your All-in-all. Oh! what a blessing it would be if every one of us should get to heaven! I do not see why we should not, the Lord being our Leader. One thing I know; if we do get there, by-and-by, there is not one of us who will throw up his cap, and shout, "Hurrah! glory be to myself! I did this." Nay, nay, nay; but we will all go together, and such crowns as grace shall give us we will cast at Jesu's feet, and the song, "Non nobis, Domine," shall go up from all of us, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." Let us begin to learn that song now, and let us sing it in life, and in death, and for ever, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM LXVIII.

This was a Psalm sung, at the removing of the ark, when it was taken up to its resting-place on Mount Zion. All the tribes were gathered together, and, in full pomp, they marched along, bearing the sacred chest. As they tramped forward, the trumpets sounded, and this Psalm rose up to God.

Verse 1. *Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.*

That is the way to move,—God first, and his people following closely after him. That is the true order of revival,—the Lord in the van, then

all his children, quick of step, to follow where he leads. The psalmist seems to take it for granted that there would be no fighting if God should arise, for all his enemies would be put to flight by his presence.

2, 3. *As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.*

The courtiers of God ought to be clad in the silks of joy, and to be bright with the jewellery of rejoicing.

4, 5. *Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.*

In the wilderness, the Israelites were like a company of fatherless people; but God was their Protector, and in all their trials and dangers he was their Defender.

6. *God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.*

They had been in a sad condition in Egypt, scattered and driven hither and thither. God promised to bring them all together, in great families, and richly to bless them.

7, 8. *O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.*

If the translators had given us the original words, we should have valued this Psalm much more, for it contains nearly every name of God. This verse would run, "Even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of Elohim, the Elohim of Israel.

9, 10. *Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.*

It rained manna, and it rained quails. There are no difficulties about the commissariat of an army when God is the Commander-in-chief. All shall be provided for those who put their trust in him.

11. *The Lord—*

Or, Adonai—

11. *Gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.*

When God speaks, he always has publishers of his message. Our Lord found a woman at the well, and sent her back to the men of the city as his messenger, and he will find many others before his work is all done.

12, 13. *Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. Though ye have lien among the pots,—*

Grimy among the brick kilns, covered with clay, and black with smoke,—despised, rejected, earthbound,—"Though ye have lien among the pots,"—

13. *Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.*

There are good times ahead for God's people. Rich and rare blessings are laid up in store for them that fear him. Therefore, let us rejoice in him even now.

14. *When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon.*

Driven from the bare, bleak mountain-side in gusts like feathers, the snow flies before the wind; and so, when God scatters the mighty, they cannot resist him: "It was as snow in Salmon."

15. *The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan.*

This hill of Zion is not high at all, it is a mere knoll compared with the lofty peaks; yet it was highly favoured. So, to carnal eyes, Christ's kingdom on earth was little in comparison with the kingdoms of this world; yet, in the sight of God, it is greater than all of them.

16. *Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the* LORD *will dwell in it for ever.*

There are grander places than Zion, but if God chooses to dwell there, his presence gives her a glory and a greatness that no other spot can have. The forces at the disposal of Zion's King are boundless; note how the psalmist enumerates some of them.

17, 18. *The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the* LORD *God might dwell among them.*

As the ark went up the hill of Zion, so has Christ ascended to the eternal glory. He is the true Ark of the covenant, and he is also the true Mercy-seat; wherefore, let our hearts rejoice in our ascended Saviour, who has "led captivity captive."

"Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also." "In due time, Christ died for the ungodly." "He made intercession for the transgressors." Let rebellious sinners catch at this great truth; and, touched by the love and grace of God, let them cease to rebel any longer.

19, 20. *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto* GOD *the Lord belong the issues from death.*

All glory be to his thrice-blessed name for all that this verse includes!

21, 22. *But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses. The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea:*

Wherever his people may have gone, God will bring them all together again, "from Bashan," or "from the depths of the sea."

23—35. *That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same. They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah: to him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.*

The Psalm ends with an ascription of praise unto God. So let our reading end, and our worship, and our lives: "Blessed be God."

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A LEAP YEAR SERMON.*

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 25TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, February 29th, 1880.

"One born out of due time."—1 Corinthians xv. 8.

PAUL thus describes himself. It was necessary that Paul, as an apostle, should have seen the Lord. He was not converted at the time of Christ's ascension; yet he was made an apostle, for the Lord Jesus appeared to him in the way, as he was going to Damascus, to persecute the saints of God. When he looked upon himself as thus put in, as it were, at the end of the apostles, he spoke of himself in the most depreciating terms, calling himself "one born out of due time."

Those who are acquainted with the Greek tongue know what a despicable term Paul here applied to himself,—as though he was scarcely a man at all,—at any rate, as the very last of the family, "born out of due time;" and not only the last, but also the very least, for he says, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Scholars will know why I cannot exactly explain the word which Paul uses, but rather keep to the rendering of our translation, which, although it may not have the force and full meaning of the Greek expression, is perhaps none the less useful for public reading: "One born out of due time."

Paul thought very humbly of himself; he reckoned himself less than nothing, put himself down at the very lowest estimate, and mentioned that he was brought to Christ, and made an apostle, when the time for such a work was apparently over. Out of date altogether, beyond the period when it might have been thought that another apostle would be called of God, there was he found as "one born out of due time."

* Although 1900 is not observed as a Leap Year, the last Sabbath in February is the nearest corresponding date to the Leap Year Sunday in 1880, when the accompanying discourse was delivered. It is therefore issued for reading on that day with the earnest prayer that it may be as profitable to those who read it as it was to those who were privileged to hear it.

My subject to-night is, first, *the singular time of Paul's spiritual birth.* There are many of God's true children who, like the apostle, were "born out of due time." When I have expatiated upon that fact, I shall speak of *the sure evidences of his spiritual birth,* and show you that, although "born out of due time," he was born, and there were sure evidences of his spiritual birth, which evidences, I trust, may be seen in many of us also.

I. First, then, let us think of THE SINGULAR TIME OF PAUL'S SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

There are still some who, like the apostle, are born to God "out of due time." They are truly born again, regenerated, converted, *at a most unlikely season.* There have been multitudes brought to Christ, under earnest sermons, when the appeals of faithful men have thrilled the congregation, and the truth has been effectually carried home to the hearts of many of the hearers. But there have also been times when God's ministers have waxed faint, when the sermon has appeared to be destitute of all force, when nobody has seemed to have felt the power of the discourse, and, apparently, the truth has fallen quite flat; yet, on many such occasions, there have been some sinners converted to God when we should hardly have thought it to be possible. Mr. Tennant, a famous American minister of Whitefield's time, one of the most earnest and seraphic men who ever proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ, had a hearer, who remained unmoved under many a score of his most faithful sermons. Others were saved, but not this man; he seemed unmoved and immovable; but it came to pass, on a certain Sabbath, that a very unusual thing happened. Mr. Tennant had prepared his sermon with great care, it was what we are wont to call a laborious discourse, into which he had put all the thought and all the pains possible; but he had not been preaching long before his memory completely failed him, his mind refused to work, and, after floundering about for a while, he was obliged to sit down in great confusion, and say that he could not preach to the people that day. The man I have mentioned, who had never before been impressed under Mr. Tennant's ministry, was that day called by sovereign grace, as "one born out of due time," for he was led to see that there was a spiritual and supernatural force which had usually helped the pastor to preach, and that, when this divine influence was withdrawn, he was as weak as other men, and could not speak with power, as he had been accustomed to do. This truth, somehow or other,—for human minds are strangely constituted, and things, which have no effect upon certain people, very greatly affect others who are present at the same time;—this truth, I say, induced the man to think; thinking, he was led to believe in God, and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul. He was, without doubt, one "born out of due time."

I would like to break down, as Mr. Tennant did, if some of you would be born to God by that means; I would rather be dumb, and win a soul for Jesus, than speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and yet men's hearts should not be impressed by the truth I proclaimed. How often I have found that, when I have gone home, and sighed, and cried, and groaned over a discourse in which I felt no

liberty, but thought it was an utter failure, it has afterwards been proved that, here one, and there another, have come forward blessing and praising God for that very testimony, which seemed to me so faulty and feeble, but which the Spirit of the Lord has savingly impressed upon them. So, still, there are some who, in this way, are "born out of due time," through the Holy Spirit's use even of the preacher's weakness and apparent failure.

Another illustration may be taken from the opposite side of the same truth. Some are converted when they seem themselves to be in a state of mind in which they are the most unlikely to be impressible. I remember being in Dr. John Campbell's house, one day, when he told me that a minister was preaching at Whitefield's old Tabernacle in Moorfields, one evening, when there were present, under very strange circumstances, two young men who had fallen into dissipated habits, and who had made an appointment with each other for the commission of some gross sin that very night. Had they committed what they had planned, it may be that they would have plunged themselves into a career of vice from which they might never have been extricated. They were passing by the Moorfields Tabernacle, which some of you remember, and as they wanted to know the time at which they were to meet for this unholy purpose, one of them said to the other, "Go in, and see the time; there is sure to be a clock in there." But the clock was not fixed as it is here, at the back of the preacher, but the other way; so the young man had to go some little distance further in than he intended, in order to see the clock. If I remember rightly, the preacher that night was Matthew Wilks, and he was just uttering some quaint remark, something that arrested the young man's attention, and held him fast in the aisle. His companion waited outside for a time, but it was cold, so he thought he had better go in, and look at the clock himself, and fetch his friend out. He went in; the arrows of the Lord pierced the heart of both of them, and the second of those young men was John Williams, the famous missionary, and at last the martyr of Erromanga. Thus, they also were "born out of due time." You would not have thought it possible that those men should become, as they did, preachers of the gospel, when they were, at that very time, desperately set on the commission of a great sin against God, and their hearts were wholly given up to the pleasures and follies of this world; but so it happened, and our Lord still knows how to stop men as he stopped Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. He is the man who says that he was "born out of due time;" and he is a wonderful instance of this method of divine interposition. He has in his possession the letters from the high priest which will enable him to bind the saints, and carry them off to Jerusalem; he is riding towards Damascus, and is within sight of the city when, in the very midst of his high-handed course of persecution, the Lord Jesus Christ himself intervenes, and smites him down to the ground. Presently, he rises to pray, and, in his three days' blindness and fasting, to seek the Lord, and then to find him, to the salvation of his soul and the joy of his spirit, and thus to become an apostle of that very Saviour whom, in his ignorance, he had been persecuting. After such a

triumph of divine grace, let us never despair of any sinner, however far he may have gone into sin. You know how Paul, writing to Timothy, said of himself, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." The God who blessed the broken sermon of Mr. Tennant can bless our imperfect work in the pulpit, the Sunday-school, or anywhere else; and the God who saved such men as John Williams and his companion, when they least thought of such a thing happening, can also save some who have strayed in here to-night, little dreaming what designs of love God has toward them in bringing them at this time under the sound of the Word.

I consider, next, that a convert may be described as one "born out of due time" when he is brought to Christ *after some great revival or notable religious movement has come to an end.* There are some of you who attended the recent special services conducted here by Messrs. Fullerton and Smith. What power there was in those hallowed gatherings! Some of your neighbours wept under conviction of sin; but you did not. Some of them came to Christ, and are now rejoicing in him; but you did not come to him. You were not even impressed during the meetings, though, possibly, you wished to be; or it may be that you began with a desire after better things, but you ended in indifference. And now the special services are all over, and the good men who came amongst us to preach and sing the gospel are gone, and you have been saying to yourselves, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Ah! but our Lord has a blessed way of picking up the stragglers behind the army. When the main body has marched on, with sound of trumpet, praising God, there are a few left behind; and the Lord Jesus sometimes comes, and picks them up. I do earnestly pray that some of you may be thus picked up by him just now, so that you may be able to say, "We were not born for God when many others were; like Saul of Tarsus, we were 'born out of due time;' but, blessed be God, we were born again by the effectual working of his Spirit, we were brought to Christ, to the praise of the glory of his grace, and now we also have become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." Pray that it may be so, dear friends. O you Christian people, bow your hearts before God, and ask that it may be so! Perhaps the very fact that those services are over, and that a gracious opportunity has gone, may be impressed upon the minds of some who were present during the meetings, but who were not converted, and they may now seek the Saviour, and find him to their everlasting salvation and happiness.

The Lord can bless strange methods to the awakening of the ungodly. When Puritanism seemed to be trodden under foot, in the reign of James I., and the king issued the Book of Sports, and gave commandment that every clergyman was to read from the pulpit, on Sunday, that it was the royal will and pleasure that the young people should play at football, cricket, and other games and pastimes on the Lord's-day afternoon, godly ministers, who really loved the Lord, did not know what to do. One of them thought, perhaps, it would be well to do as the king ordered, and to say something beside, so, when

the Sunday came for reading the Book of Sports to the people, he said, "I am commanded by the king and the authorities to read to you the following document; but it grieves my heart and conscience to have to read it. I know it is wicked, and wrong, and shameful, and abominable to desecrate the Sabbath as you are invited to do, and I wonder what will become of my country when even from the church itself Sabbath-breaking is recommended." So the good man spoke, to the relief of his own conscience, and in hope of arousing the consciences of others. It happened that there was in the congregation, that day, a young man who had always been a ringleader in the Sabbath sports; he was no sooner out of church, in the morning, than he was on the village green, fast and furious in all the amusements of the time; but, when he heard that Book of Sports read, he said to himself, "Well, I acted in that way on my own account, and it was wrong enough for me to do so; but now I say, with the minister, 'What is to become of all the country if everybody is to be as bad as I have been? What will happen to the nation if this kind of thing is to go on?'" The thought struck him so forcibly that he became first a serious character, and then a true seeker after God, and afterwards a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. So it came to pass that, when the devil thought he was going to have everything his own way, that very day, this young man was born to God,—truly, "born out of due time."

I recollect reading a very striking saying of Mr. Bunyan's. He said he had good reason to believe that, in the generation after him, there would be many more saints than in the one of which he formed a part, and his belief was based upon the fact that, wherever he went, he found that there were so many great sinners that he hoped they would be converted, and become eminent servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, there was a blessed truth at the back of that hope of his; for, very often, where sin has abounded, grace does much more abound; and when the Word of God seems to grow scarce, and the candle of the gospel burns but dimly, we may pray and expect that even then, some may be "born out of due time" to the praise of the glory of that grace which saves as it wills, and often selects the very chief of sinners to be the subjects of its almighty power.

There have been some dear friends, who may be said to have been "born out of due time," for they have been converted to God *after it seemed impossible that they ever should be.* I recollect well reading of one who imbibed sceptical notions, and became exceedingly furious against the preaching of the Word. One day, in Edinburgh, he heard it said that a certain eminent minister of the gospel intended, if he met him, to speak with him about his soul; whereupon the man uttered some very strong expressions, and, amongst other wicked things, he said, "I shall never be converted unless I lose my senses." All who were acquainted with him, and who knew how desperately he was set against the gospel, thought that his was indeed a hopeless case; but, in the infinite mercy of God, it turned out to be quite the opposite. He began to suffer from great incoherence of thought, his mind gradually wandered, when he was trying to speak, he often spoke utter nonsense. He became unfit for business, and had to be put into

the custody of someone who watched him as his keeper. Reason was not actually gone, but it was reeling upon its throne; and while he was in that sad state, the case of Nebuchadnezzar came to his mind, and he wondered whether God had given him up, altogether, on account of what he had said,—that he would never be converted while he was in his senses. He turned his mind, all shipwrecked and battered as it was, towards God; and out of the depths of his half-bewildered spirit, he cried unto the Lord as Nebuchadnezzar did, and his mind returned to him, and he became a humble, gentle, holy believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you not think, dear friends, that he also was "one born out of due time"? The time of salvation seemed utterly past so far as he was concerned. He had made a covenant with death, and a league with hell; he had cast off those ordinary beliefs which many men hold even though they do not obey them; yet, notwithstanding all that, the surprising grace of God dealt with him after its own sovereign manner, and laid him low, that it might bring him up again. I do not pray that such a thing may happen to anybody here; but I do pray that God may bring you to Christ somehow, and anyhow; and if, in order to attain that end, you have to be driven to the very gates of hell,—so long as you do not actually pass through them,—I will rejoice if, afterwards, you are led to flee to Christ for refuge.

Another instance of "one born out of due time" occurs in the case of one *converted after the spiritual father is dead.* We sometimes see posthumous children, that is, those who are born after the father is deceased; and there is generally much sorrow mingled with the thought of such births, for the poor widow's heart is doubly troubled by the extra care needed for the little stranger who arrives after the bread-winner of the family is taken away. But if a man is the means of bringing another to Christ after he himself is dead, there need be no sorrow about that matter. There have been many, many instances, in which earnest Christian people have sought the conversion of their relatives or friends; they have prayed for them, and wept over them, and pleaded with them, but all their efforts have been unsuccessful; yet, after their death, the memory of their holy zeal has touched the conscience of the one who would not yield before, and brought him to Christ. I wish, dear friends, that your godly mother, who is in heaven, and who died leaving her son unsaved, might seem to come to you just now. I ask for no apparition, but that she may be consciously present to your mind, and that her dying words may ring in your ear, for perhaps the remembrance of what she said may be blessed to you even now. When I am taken away, I can but wish that any true and faithful word that I have spoken may still continue to speak to you from my grave. When good Mr. Payson died, he begged that his people might come and see him, if they wished, before he was interred; and those who did so read these words on his bosom, "Remember the word which I have spoken unto you being yet present with you." It was thus his desire, you see, that he should have posthumous spiritual children, that they should be born to God even though they should seem to be "born out of due time." Ah! you wives, who have been praying

for your husbands these many years, never give them up, because they may be brought to Christ when you yourselves will be in heaven. Mothers and fathers, never cease pleading for your children, for they, too, may be brought to Jesus when you are among the angels. Up in one of the northern counties of England, there was a woman, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose prayer went up continually for her husband; but he never entered the house of God, and despised her for doing so. She was accustomed to go to her usual place of worship alone, so far as any human companions were concerned, yet she was not quite alone, for there was a dog that always went with her. This dog curled himself up under the seat, and lay quite still during the service, and then walked home with his mistress. The first Sunday after she was dead, the poor dog went off to the meeting-house as usual, and curled himself up in his old place. He did the same the next Sunday, and the husband, noticing the dog start out so regularly, was struck by its action, and wondered where the dog went now that his mistress was gone; so he thought he would go and see. The dog went before him to his mistress's old seat, and curled himself up; the man went in after the dog, and sat down in his wife's place, and God helped the minister, that day, to show him that his good works and self-righteousness, in which he had always trusted, would not be sufficient for his salvation, and he preached to him the full salvation of Christ Jesus, and the man believed and lived. Was not he also "born out of due time," for his wife's prayers for him were all over, and she was gone? Yet was he brought to Christ.

The subject is one upon which I might enlarge indefinitely, but I would rather leave you to supply further instances of similar blessing, by urging you to persevere in prayer, you who are seeking the salvation of others.

Some have been "born out of due time" because they have been *converted to God in extreme old age.* I should like to encourage any very aged person who is here, and still unsaved, and to drive away altogether the notion that it is too late to seek the Lord. It never is too late so long as life lasts, and there is the power to repent of sin and to turn to the Lord.

> "While the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return."

I will not quote cases, but I have a vivid recollection of a good many persons who have been saved at the age of seventy or eighty. We have had persons, past both of those periods, baptized upon profession of their newly-found faith. The world's proverb says, "It is never too late to mend;" but Christ would tell you, if he were here in bodily presence, that it is never too late for him to mend you, or rather, for him to make you anew, for that is the work he undertakes to do. It is never too late for him to stretch out his pierced hand, and help the man, who is tottering on his staff, to become a babe in Christ. Yet, surely when very old men are born again, they seem to be "born out of due time."

Many of you have not yet come to old age, yet, if God should save you to-night, you would be as those who are "born out of due time,"

because you are *on the very brink of the grave.* Consumption has laid its cruel hand upon you, and pulled down all your strength. In all probability, you will not be long in this world. You have come out to-night, but you are half-afraid that you have done wrong in coming in the state you are in, with that terrible cough that you have; yet you have not found the Saviour. O my dear young friend, wherever you may be, it is a sad, sad thing to be carrying about with you your death-warrant, as you certainly are doing, and yet to have no warrant to believe that, when you die, it will be well with you! Oh, I pray you, do not let Satan tempt you with the idea that, now, when sickness is upon you, there is no hope for you! Come to Jesus, however consumptive you look. Come to Jesus, young man, with that chest that scarcely allows you to breathe. Come unto him, for he will not cast you away. I remember one, whom I met at Mentone, who had gone there in the hope of lengthening his life; but that was quite out of the question, for he was too far gone when he came. He had two sisters, who were sent for to come to him, for it was certain that he could not live long. He himself was under deep concern of soul, earnestly seeking the Lord, but he could not find him. Day after day, week after week, he had been getting worse and worse, and showing all the signs of his approaching departure; but he could not find peace with God. At last, his sisters came from England. They arrived just in time. They found him very anxious about his soul; that night, they spoke with him of Jesus, and in the morning, early, when they woke, they went to him, and he was sitting up in bed, all pale and ghostlike. He said, "Sisters, Christ has forgiven me;" and he fell back on his pillow, and he was gone home. There was an end of his suffering and weakness here below; but the consolation of that last word to them, and of the joy that beamed from his poor eyes, was enough to make them gladly commit his body to the tomb. "Sisters, Christ has forgiven me." Ah! he was indeed "born out of due time,"—born between the very jaws of death; but death's jaws could not close upon him till he had received forgiveness from his Saviour. I beseech any of you, who are in a similar condition to his, do not put off seeking the Lord, but hasten to find him even now.

Once more, there are some who are "born out of due time" because they are *born all of a sudden.* They suddenly come to Christ; they suddenly find peace; they are suddenly saved. I wish that might happen to some here to-night. There is no need of any set period for this all-important matter; time is no element in the case. God can work conviction and conversion in a single instant. You know that, sometimes, you see a flash of lightning, and then you wait several seconds before you hear the thunder; but when a storm is right overhead, the flash and the clap are simultaneous, and down comes the pouring rain at the same time. And, in like manner, the Lord knows how to send a flash of conviction, and, at the same instant, to make his deep voice of mercy to be heard in the soul, and to send the waterfloods of grace upon the spirit there and then. Why should he not do so to-night for any of you who need these blessings?

Now I will tell you the special reason why I chose this text; that is, because this is the 29th of February, and it is a Sunday. There

is a large number of you who never saw a 29th of February on Sunday before, and there is a larger number still who will never see the 29th of February on a Sunday again. I suppose it will be eight-and-twenty years before that will occur again. So, this is a Sunday thrown in, as it were; it is an odd kind of day, an extra day in the calendar. If you ask our friends of the Greek Church, the Russians, they will tell you that there is not such a day at all, for they keep to the old system of reckoning time. This plan of putting in an odd day, every four years, to make our days square with the sun, is a very good and proper one; still, it is a kind of a day thrown in; and it seemed to me that if the Lord would convert some souls on this odd day in this leap year, it would make the 29th of February, that came on a Sunday, to be specially memorable. You will not forget it if it is the day of your conversion; you will say to your children, it may be, eight-and-twenty years hence, if you are alive, "Ah! I recollect when the 29th of February last came on a Sunday, and that was the day when I sought and found the Lord. Mr. Spurgeon said that I was like the apostle Paul, 'one born out of due time,' and so I was; yet I was born in due time, I know, according to the covenant of grace." Oh, that the Lord, of his infinite mercy, having given us this special day, would now give us a special blessing, and bring many to himself this leap year! Oh, that all of you, who are still unsaved, would make a leap right out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son, his Holy Spirit enabling you so to do by a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ! And you Christian people, pray for a special and unusual blessing, a 29th of February blessing. Ask God to give it to us, in his infinite mercy, that many and many a soul may be "born out of due time" this very night.

Who shall it be? And where shall the work of repentance begin? Does not somebody over there say, "Lord, let it be me"? There is said to be a special opportunity of making proposals in leap year; but I can tell you, if you make a proposal to come to Christ, that he has long ago set his heart on you. You would never have thought of proposing to him if he had not first of all ordained to bring you to himself. If you come to him, he will receive you; and, oh! in his great mercy, may the Holy Spirit incline you to come to him this 29th of February that falls upon a Sunday.

II. Now I have only two or three minutes left for the second part of my subject,—THE SURE EVIDENCES OF PAUL'S SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

Though Paul was, in a spiritual sense, "born out of due time," he was truly born again; and those persons, who have been converted at singular times, and under strange circumstances, have been really converted. How do we know that Paul was born again, and that he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ?

I answer, first, because *he had seen the Lord.* After mentioning those who saw the risen Christ, he says, "Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." The first evidence that he was an apostle was that he had actually beheld the Lord. Now, in a spiritual sense, one of the marks of a true believer is that he has seen the Lord. My dear friend, if you have looked to Christ for forgiveness, even though you have only looked to him to-night, and this is an

odd night,—the 29th of February, yet, if you have by faith seen Jesus on the cross, and truly trusted him, you are as much saved as the man is who believed in Christ fifty years ago. Looking to Jesus is the evidence that we are born again; and happy is everyone who can truthfully say, concerning Christ, "He was seen of me also."

"I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood."

I looked to him; he looked on me; and we were one for ever. I trusted to him, and therefore I am saved. If you can say that from your heart, and the Holy Spirit bears witness that what you say is true, you need not raise any question about your new birth. If thou art trusting in Jesus, it is well with thy soul in time and to eternity.

The next evidence of his spiritual birth, which Paul gave, was that *he confessed his sin.* Read the verse following our text: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." See how he confessed his sin and forsook it. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Are you, dear friend, willing now to confess your sin? Do you turn from it with loathing? Do you desire, henceforth, to be delivered entirely from it? Well, then, your repentance is another sure evidence that you are born again. If you have seen Jesus taking your sin upon himself, and suffering its dread penalty; if you have confessed your sin, and by faith laid it upon him as your Sacrifice and Substitute, you are born again, though you may have been, in a certain sense, "born out of due time."

Next, we are sure that Paul was really born again because *he was thoroughly converted.* Never was there a greater change in any man than there was in him; he never went back to his former life, and he had no hankering to return to it. With him, old things had passed away, and all things had become new; he was, indeed, a new creature in Christ Jesus.

I am sure he was converted, also, because *he praised the grace of God.* Read the 10th verse: "By the grace of God I am what I am." Even when he truthfully says, "I laboured more abundantly than they all;" he humbly adds, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." It is a sure sign of conversion when a man knows that he is saved by grace alone, and does not attribute it to his own merit, or his own work, but praises and adores the sovereign mercy and grace of God. Have you that evidence, dear friend? Then are you born aright, even though "born out of due time."

And, lastly, Paul proved that he was a true citizen of the New Jerusalem because he became, of all men, *most zealous for Christ,* zealous for the gospel, zealous for the winning of souls. He seemed to try to do all he could to undo the mischief he had wrought in the days of his unregeneracy, and to work with both his hands and all his heart to establish and extend the kingdom which once he tried to overthrow. O God, by thy great mercy, cause another Paul to be born in this house of prayer to-night! Thou canst do it; wilt thou not bring to thyself, by the power of the Eternal Spirit, some wild, threatening, blustering, blaspheming hater of Christ, lay him at the dear feet of

the Crucified, and cause him to look up and live? Pray for this, dear Christian people. Pray for it to-night, when you reach your homes as well as now; and then we shall have special reason to recollect this 29th of February. Possibly, someone, who will in days to come stand on this very spot preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, will say to you, "Do you remember the 29th of February, 1880? Do you recollect the text, 'One born out of due time'?" I trust that some of you will be here to hear him say, "I recollect it better than any of you do, for that was the night when I was born to God, glory be to his holy name!" Now pray for it with all your hearts, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN III. 1—18.

If you were sent for to visit a dying man, and you wished to select a chapter which would set the truth before him very briefly and very clearly, you could not make a better choice than this 3rd chapter of the Gospel according to John. So, as we are all dying men and women, let us read it with that same desire, and may the Holy Spirit apply it to our hearts as we read it!

Verses 1, 2. *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night,—*

That was better than not coming at all. "Better late than never." Better come to Christ in the dark than not come to him at all.

2. *And said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

This was good reasoning on the part of Nicodemus. If he did not at first go as far as he afterwards did, it argued well for him that he went as far as he could. O thou who art troubled with unbelief, believe as much as thou canst; and then cry, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief; and, especially, help me to get rid of it." Confess to Christ what thou dost believe, and he will add more to thy belief.

3. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

He cannot understand what it is; he cannot know anything about it; he cannot see it.

4, 5. *Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

If the "water" mentioned here relates to baptism,—which I greatly question,—then, certainly, it shows the way of entrance for a believer, publicly, into the kingdom of God. But if it relates to the purifying power of the Spirit of God,—as I believe it does,—then it teaches us that no man enters into the kingdom of God, and becomes a partaker of its privileges,—which is something more than merely seeing it,—except the Spirit of God shall be to him as water purifying him from sin. This is the reason why a man cannot enter into the spiritual kingdom until he is born again, born from above.

6. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh;*

And "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

6. *And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

And only the new creature, which is thus born, can, by any possibility, understand or enter into the possession of the spiritual things which belong to the kingdom of God.

7, 8. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is mysterious, like the wind, and so is the creature that is "born of the Spirit." The spiritual man often cannot understand himself,—he is so mysterious a being;—how then shall he be able fully to comprehend how that wondrous new life is created within him? All we know is, that it is a new creation, as much the work of eternal power as our first creation.

9, 10. *Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?*

"These things" that lie at the very root of everything. "Art thou a Rabbi, and dost thou not know this?" Alas, good Master, there are still many Rabbis who do not understand this; many, who have taken the highest degree the University can give them, yet do not know in their own souls what it is to be born again!

11. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.*

Spiritual men declare that there are spiritual things. They know them, and have seen them; and they have a right to be believed, for they are not liars. They are honest men, and speak what they do know; yet, often, their witness is not received. They need not be surprised at this, for it was the same with their Master.

12. *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

If these elementary truths about the new birth stagger you, what is the use of my going on to anything higher? You would not understand it, or receive it.

13. *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*

He alone knows the secrets of God who has been with God, who has come from God, and who is still with God.

14—18. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

God give us, even now, deliverance from condemnation through faith in his dear Son, and prevent our being condemned through our unbelief, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—416, 222, 511.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THINGS UNKNOWN.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 4TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Lord's-day Evening, early in the year 1858.

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."—Jeremiah xxxiii. 3.

GOD'S people will never thrive on anything less substantial than bread from heaven. Israel in Egypt might live on garlic and onions, but Israel in the wilderness must be fed with the manna that came down from heaven, and with the water that gushed out of the rock, when it was smitten by the rod of God. The child of God, while he is yet in his sins, may, like other men, revel in them, and the pleasures and follies of this world may be his delight; but when he is once brought out of Egypt, by the high hand of God's purpose, and the almighty hand of God's strength, he will never live on anything less than God's promise and God's truth. It is in vain for men to try to remove his doubts and strengthen his self-confidence, it is in vain for men to endeavour to feed him with man-made doctrine or with rationalistic ideas, he must have something that is divine, that has the stamp of revelation upon it; in fact, unless we can come forth every Sabbath with a "Thus saith the Lord," we are not capable ministers of the New Covenant, and it is not in our power to comfort the Lord's children.

In this chapter we find the prophet Jeremiah in prison; he was shut up in the court of the prison, and in order to comfort him, the Word of the Lord came to him saying, "Thus saith the Lord." Something less than that may suffice, in the time of our prosperity, to make our hopes buoyant; for, alas! there is enough of the natural man in the Christian to make him rejoice even in carnal things when he is far from being thoroughly sanctified; but when we are in trouble, when affliction and adversity, sickness and suffering, are trying us, there is no man-made raft upon which our soul can float through floods of tribulation and waves of deep distress, but we must have the divine life-buoy of a "Thus saith the Lord." That is what the Christian wants in every time and in every place, but this is what he more especially needs when he does business in deep waters, and is

sorely exercised by affliction, "Thus saith the Lord." My text is a "Thus saith the Lord." "Thus saith the Lord, call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

Here is, first, *a large promise;* here is, secondly, *an implied imperfection;* and here is, thirdly, *a particular application of the promise, making up for that imperfection.*

I. Here is, first, A LARGE PROMISE: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee."

Now, if any friend should write us a letter containing such words as these, "Call unto me, and I will answer you," we should naturally understand by them, that whatever we might ask of our friend, he would most assuredly give us; and if he were a person in whose ability and kindness we had confidence, we should not be very slow in availing ourselves of his permission to seek his aid. If we were in debt, we should apply to him for financial help, so that we might be able to meet our liabilities; if we were tried by sickness, we should apply to him that he might give us medicines to relieve our pains; if our friends had been ungrateful to us, we should most likely call upon him for sympathy; and if our spirits were distressed from some unknown cause, if we believed him to have immense wisdom, we should ask him for some cordial to raise us from our distress.

But how different is the case when we read these words as coming from the lips of God! Then, my brethren, how strange it is that, instead of making use of them, we just read them as a matter of course, but we seldom think of making use of them. "Yes," we say, "it is a very comforting doctrine, that God answers prayer; it is truly consolatory to hear our minister inform us that, whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive." But there the matter ends; and, except with a few choice spirits, it remains a matter of doctrine, and not a matter of practice to us. "O fools, and slow of heart to believe," our Master might well say to us; and if he should come into our hearts, he would administer a thousand rebukes to us for our slackness in proving the truth of his promise. For God means what he says; and inasmuch as he has said, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee," he intends that his words should stand good; and he wishes us to believe them to be true, and therefore to prove our faith by acting upon them. Alas! the truth is too plain to be disputed, that the most of us, while, in a sense, we receive this doctrine because it is in the Bible, do not so receive it as to put it into practice. In introducing, to your notice, the great general truth, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee," I shall probably have to answer a host of objections and questions.

"Well," says one person, "would you wish us to believe, sir, that whatever we ask in prayer we shall receive?" I must reply to you with discretion. In the first place, who are you who now ask that question? Are you a child of God, or are you a worldling? Have you been born again, or are you still what you were by nature, without any renewal from the Holy Spirit? For, upon your answer to that question, mine must depend. If you are still without the Spirit of God, and are unrenewed, I would remind you of that passage which

says, concerning the wicked, "Even his prayer shall be abomination;" and if your prayer be an abomination, of course you cannot expect God to accept an abomination, and answer it. You must, therefore, know that you yourself are a partaker of the grace of God, or else this promise does not belong to you.

You grant me that, and then you ask me this question, "Sir, I hope I am a child of God; am I, therefore, to understand that, whatever I shall ask for in prayer, I shall receive of God?" To you also I must answer with discretion; lest, in endeavouring to state a truth, I should utter a falsehood. I must first ask you in what state of heart you are as a child of God. Have you been lately communing with Christ? Have you been constant in the study of his Word? What are your wishes? What are your wants? What are your desires? For, upon your answers to these questions, my reply to your enquiry must depend. It may be that you are a Christian; but, nevertheless, though an Israelite, you, like Israel in the wilderness, are asking for meat that you may satisfy your own lust, even as they did; but when they craved for flesh and the Lord sent them quails, while the meat was yet in their mouths, the curse of the Lord came upon them.

We are sure to have our prayers answered, if it is right that they should be answered. Sometimes, even the Lord's people ask for things which it would not be for God's glory to give, nor for their profit to receive. If you should tell your child you would give him anything he liked to ask for, you would not for a moment suppose that you included in the promise any absurd request he might make. Suppose he should ask you for a dose of arsenic, suppose he should request you to kill him, would you fulfil your promise? Certainly not. You would say, "My child, I love you too well to listen to the ravings of your madness; I desire your good too much to grant your absurd request, and I cannot hearken to you. God says the same: "'Call upon me, and I will answer you,' but I will not always answer you as you wish to be answered. If you ask for a thing which is not fit for you to receive, I will give you something better. I will not give you that very thing; I will hear your prayers, but I will not give you exactly what you ask for, but I will grant you something infinitely superior to the thing itself."

It would be a sad thing if God always heard our prayers, and gave us just what we asked of him. If he always gave us the exact thing we asked for, we should ruin ourselves. You may have heard the story of a woman who had a child who was very ill; and when her pastor called to see her, she asked him to pray for the child's life, and in the prayer he very properly said, "O Lord, spare this child's life, *if it be thy will.*" The mother interrupted him, and said, "No, I cannot have it so; this child must live. I want you to pray to God that the child may live whether God wills it or no." The minister said, "Woman, you will have cause to tremble on account of this petition. If you ask such a thing as this of God, there will be a curse upon it." Nevertheless, the prayer was prayed; and, twenty years afterwards, that woman, with an aching heart, saw her son riding in a cart to Tyburn, where he was going to be hanged. Better would it have been for him and also for

her that he had perished at the breast, and been carried to an untimely grave, than that he should send her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. God, therefore, makes this very kind reservation that, if we ask for absurd things, things which would not be for our profit, he will not grant them.

But the question is put to me again, "Sir, if I ask for a thing which is obviously a good thing, which is most assuredly for my profit, may I be certain, after I have asked in prayer for that thing, that I shall have it?" Once more, I must ask another question. Have you yet learned the heavenly art of believing God? Because, you may be a Christian, you may believe in Christ enough for your soul's salvation; but you may be so small a Christian that you have never yet attained the mountain height of belief in all your Lord has uttered. And, mark you, the promise of an answer to our prayers is only given to our faith. The Lord Jesus Christ put it thus to his disciples: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Now, if you go on your knees in prayer, and ask God for anything, and do not believe that he will give it to you, it may come in God's extraordinary bounty, but it will not come in answer to your prayer. Your prayers shall be answered in proportion to your faith; so, if you believe, and ask for a thing that is for your good and God's glory, you will have it as surely as the promise is a promise, and God is God. I have talked with many Christians, and some of my aged friends have talked with far more than I have, but both they and myself can bear witness that we have never yet met with any Christian that could charge God with breaking his promise. We have met with many who have been far from having the faith they ought to have, but we have never discovered one so faithless to God as to charge him with not answering the prayer that was stamped with believing. Whenever there is faith, there will be the answer to the prayer of faith; you will never hear a Christian deny that truth.

It was my privilege, some two years ago, when at Bristol, to visit the Orphan House of Mr. Müller, and I never saw a more striking or startling exhibition of the power of faith than I did there. Mr. Müller supports three hundred orphan children on no resources but his own faith and prayer. When he needs anything, he calls them together, offers supplication to God, and asks that necessaries may be supplied; and, although there are three hundred to be fed, to be clothed, and to be housed, and though they have often been brought so low that there has not been a farthing in their coffers, nor a handful of meal in their barrel, when mealtime has come, there has always been abundance of bread in the house in answer to prayer. I shall never forget my interview with that holy man of God. Some gentleman said to me, "I wish you would ask Mr. Müller a question or two, if you see him, as to the foundation of a new Orphan House which he proposes to build to hold seven hundred more children. Now, I feel that three hundred is quite enough for one man to care for; I think it is very absurd for him to have seven hundred more; he will never be able to support a thousand. As to the present Institution, I believe that generous persons hear about it, and send him subscriptions for its main-

tenance; but as to his supporting seven hundred more orphans, that is impossible." I replied, "I think there is something in what you say. I will ask him when I see him." But when I saw him, I could not, and dare not, ask him any such questions; and when I saw what a great work he had done by his faith, and began to remark upon it, he said, "Oh! it is only a little thing that I have done; faith could do far more than that. If it were God's will that I should feed the universe on prayer and faith, I could do it. If I had more faith, it could be accomplished." I was just going to say that, possibly, a thousand orphans would be more than he could support, when he said, "When I got three hundred children, I began to pray God to send me money to build an Orphan House to hold seven hundred more; and I have already £17,000 sent in for it, although I have never solicited a contribution from anybody but the Lord. I believe God has made me to be here, to be to the world a proof that he hears and answers prayer." I thought so, too, when I saw that huge building, and the many dear children rising up to praise their God, and singing so sweetly in honour of the good Shepherd, who had gathered them like lambs to his bosom, and had gently folded them there.

Brethren, we do not speak without solid facts to confirm our assertion, when we affirm that, whatever a saint asks in prayer, if he asks in faith, and it is for his own profit, and for God's glory, he will be sure to have it. I daresay you have read Huntington's "Bank of Faith." He certainly gives us too many of those instances for most people to believe, but I fancy there are plenty of persons alive who have had as many answers to their prayers as ever William Huntington had, and who, if they were to write the minutiæ of their lives, could bear most solemn testimony to the truth that never could they remember God being unfaithful to his promises, or their prayers unanswered. This, however, must always depend upon the person himself, for if we ask waveringly, or without faith, we must not expect to be answered. We must not forget that what God implies, when he does not grant unbelieving requests, is just this, "Inasmuch as you have no faith, I have nothing to give you." We must do as the people did at Christmas time in the olden days. It used to be the custom for the poor inhabitants in a village to go round with basins to the rich people in the parish, and beg bread and other victuals of them; and the rule was, that every gentleman was to fill the bowl that was brought to his door. Of course, the wisest amongst the poor folk brought a very large bowl for the Christmas gathering, but those who had little faith in the generosity of their wealthy neighbours took a small bowl, and that was filled; but those who took a big bowl had theirs filled too. So, dear friends, you must always try, in your prayers, to bring a big bowl to God. Bring great faith, and rest assured that, according to thy faith, it shall be done unto thee. If thou hast little faith, thou shalt have a little answer; if thou hast tolerable faith, thou shalt have a tolerable answer; and if thou hast a mighty faith, thou shalt have such a mighty answer that thou shalt wonder at it, yet thou shalt feel that it is according to the promise of our text, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee."

II. Now we come to the second part of our subject, and we notice AN IMPLIED IMPERFECTION: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." It is implied that God's people do not know everything.

Did you ever meet with a man who knew everything? I have happened to meet with half-a-dozen such. I once met with a minister who knew all things,—according to his own account, I mean, not according to mine. He told me, when I saw him, that, in the parish where he lived, there were not more than a dozen people who knew the Lord Jesus Christ in truth. I was interested in that man, for I knew a little about him, so I said to him, "Well, who are they?" So he began, "Well, there is myself, and my wife, and my two deacons," and so on. "Oh!" I answered, "the only person I should dispute out of that number would be yourself, because I think you know too much by a great deal; you seem to have climbed up, and to have looked into the secret roll of God's decrees. No child of God would do that. Children do not look into their father's secrets; it is only thieves who do that. I should doubt your claim to be a child of God."

Each of us, at times, meets with an interesting individual who knows far too much, in whose company one always feels uncomfortable. We never introduce any subject, we leave him to do that, because he is the Pope of our circle. He hates Popery, of course; two Popes cannot agree; so, naturally, he has a very strong objection to the Pope of Rome. He himself knows all things. You utter a sentiment; he tells you directly that it is not sound; he knows, of course. You talk about a matter of experience; but he says, "That is not the experience of the living child of God." He is umpire, of course; he knows all about it; he is the judge who ends all strife; he settles everything. Bring him in, his vote is the casting vote, which it were almost profane to controvert. He is King, Lords, and Commons, all rolled into one; he makes the laws, and he fulfils them. He is, in his own sphere, the Autocrat of all Christians. Now, God's children belong to a very different order of beings from this very respectable and very venerable individual; they do not know everything, and they do not pretend to be full of all knowledge. One of the best of them, whose name was Paul, said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

An old man once met a young one who had been to College about six months; and he said to him, "Do you know much?" "Yes," the young man answered, "I am getting on very fast." The old man said, "You will not say that in a year's time, or else I shall have no hope for you." In a year's time, he asked him whether he knew much more than he did six months before. He replied, "Sometimes, I think I know a great deal more, but, at other times, I think I know a great deal less. I have discovered my own ignorance more than ever this last year." Then the old man said, "By the time you have

been in College four years, you will confess yourself to be a very great fool;" and when he met him, during the fourth year, he said, "What do you know now?" The student replied, "I think perhaps I know more than when I entered College; but, in my own opinion, I know much less. When I first came, I thought myself competent to give a decisive opinion upon every subject; now, I am obliged to weigh everything before I am able to state anything positively. My own ignorance has been discovered."

Now, depend upon it, dear friends, it will be the same with each of you. We may think, when we first join the church, "We know almost everything." Some people suppose that all the truth is found in the Baptist denomination; others imagine it is all in the Episcopalian, Independent, or Wesleyan denomination, or in whatever sect they belong to; but when we have been members of the Baptist denomination for some considerable time, we discover that there are several faults amongst us; and we think, perhaps, that if we were fashioned according to the Presbyterian model, we might be improved. By-and-by, we find a friend who attends an Episcopal church, where he hears the gospel very plainly preached by a very earnest clergyman, and we say we think there is something good in the Episcopalians; and the longer we live, the more we find that there is something good in all; and that, after all, we do not know so much as we thought we did, and that our church, though it seemed to be the very model of perfection, is found to be full of infirmities, as well as any other church, and it is not exactly *the* Church after all.

I repeat, then, the assertion that is implied in the text, that we have, all of us, a certain amount of ignorance and imperfection; for if we knew all things, we should have no necessity for this promise, that God would show us great and mighty things, which we do not know. But, as we are still imperfect, and growing in our knowledge, this promise is exceedingly precious to us. I can scarcely think that I have any person here of that particular clique, who fancy they know everything. If I have, I would say a word to him. There is a certain body of excellent men, who call themselves "God's dear people!" That is just what they are; they are dear to anybody, nobody would think of buying them. If they were to be given away, they would be scarcely worth having. They are God's *dear* people. They hear their minister preach a sermon, made up of the extract of gall and bitterness, and that just pleases them. His people rejoice in that kind of talk, and say that he is a faithful minister. If he were to leave off being bitter, he would not be faithful,—faithfulness, according to their meaning, consists in finding fault with all the world besides. They tell you to go to "Little Bethel," "Rehoboth," or "Bethesda," because there is no truth anywhere else. It is only there that the truth is to be had, and all other congregations are schismatics, whom it is their duty to denounce and persecute with the utmost rigour of the gospel, and you are aware that the utmost rigour of the gospel is worse than the utmost rigour of the law. The rigour of the gospel is more intolerable than even the rule of Draco himself; for those persons exclude, denounce, and condemn every man who is not to the very turn of a hair's breadth in conformity with their views.

To every such person we say, "Dear brother, you are very wise! All hail to you! We will put you in the chair as the marvellous Doctor of Divinity. You are the man, wisdom will die with you; and, whilst we humbly bow at your feet, we are obliged to say that you do not know everything yet; there are a few things that need to be revealed even to you; and while we keep ourselves at a respectful distance from anything like your superior knowledge, we are compelled to think that you have not yet attained unto perfection, and we cannot admit that you are the only man in all the world who understands and knows the gospel." Well, though our brother will not join with us in saying, "We do not know all things," I think that all who are here present will bow their heads, and each one will say, "Lord, teach me what I do not know; for the little that I know is nothing to be compared with the volumes of thy wisdom which I have not read, and do not yet understand."

III. Now we come to the third head of our subject, which is the best of all. We have here THE PARTICULAR APPLICATION OF THE PROMISE: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

First, we understand this promise to relate to *gospel doctrines*. I confess that, when I first preached in a country village as its pastor, I read all Dr. Gill's "Body of Divinity" and Calvin's "Institutes"; and when I had done that, I thought, "Now I have got hold of *the truth*, I am certain I have; and I can meet all opponents, and if they are not conformed to the views of that most learned man, Dr. Gill, and that excellent confessor, John Calvin, I will soon cut them up root and branch." Well, I began to preach what I had learned from these great and good men, and I have never been ashamed of having done so, for, as a successor of Dr. Gill, I am not ashamed to endorse his views even now, and to subscribe to the doctrinal statements that John Calvin uttered. However, I soon began to find out that there was a good deal to be said, after all, concerning some matters that Dr. Gill and John Calvin did not mention, and I found that I was obliged somewhat to stretch my charity, and to take to my heart some brethren who did not quite see all things which those enlightened men saw. And, moreover, I found out that I did not know everything, and that I had a good deal still to learn, and I find the same thing every day. I hope at all times to hold firmly all the truth I have received. I intend to grasp tightly with one hand the truths I have already learned, and to keep the other hand wide open to take in the things I do not yet know.

Perhaps I have some young man here who has a notion that some minister has got all the truth, or that he himself has embraced all the truth. Now, young man, there are a great many things that you do not know; there are some doctrines you do not understand. If you will wait a little while, and study your Bible more, you will go down on your knees, and say, "Lord, I never knew my own ignorance so much as I do now; wilt thou teach me thy truth?" Do we desire to understand the truth of God? Let us not be discouraged. In answer to our prayers, God will show us "great and mighty things" which we do not know now. You are a Christian,

yet you do not comprehend the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of effectual calling puzzles you. You are a Churchman, perhaps, yet you do not know anything about these things. You are like a man I met once in a railway carriage. He said he was a High Churchman, and I said I was a High Churchman too. "How can that be?" he enquired, "you are a Dissenter." "But," I replied, "I believe many of the doctrines of your Church." He said, "I think not." "Well," I said "I believe in the doctrines of election, predestination, and so on." "Oh!" he said, "I do not." "But," I said, "they are in your Articles." He said, "I believe the Catechism, but I have not read the Articles." "Then," I rejoined, "I am the better Churchman of the two; you are the Dissenter, and I am the High Churchman. You ought to be turned out of the Church if you do not believe the Articles. They ought to take me, and give me a first-rate living, and make me one of their bishops; for I have read the Articles, and studied them."

A great many people do not know what they believe. No person has a right to say he is a Churchman, till he has read the Prayer-book. You have no right to say you are a Wesleyan till you have read Wesley's sermons; and you have no right to say you are a Calvinist till you have read what Calvin believed; and you have no right to say you are a Christian till you have read your Bible, for the Bible is the standard of Christian faith and practice; and when you come to read your Bibles, you will find this one thing out, that your own little views were not quite so wide as the Bible, after all; and you will have to say, "Lord, show me great and mighty things, which I know not now." I am persuaded that neither the Church of England, nor the Wesleyans, nor the Independents, nor the Baptists, have got all the truth. I would not belong to any one of these denominations, for all the land that is beneath the sky, if I had to endorse all that is held by them. I believe that the Church ought to be governed by an Episcopalian Presbyterian Baptist Independency. I believe we are all right in a great many of our doctrines, but that we all have something yet to learn. The doctrine of "man's responsibility" is not to be denied, nor the doctrine of "God's sovereignty" to be disputed. I hope that, some day, we shall all bring our views to the test of the Sacred Scriptures. Then shall we have one Church, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Then shall we know great and mighty things which we know not now. I would persuade you, my Baptist friends, that your system is not perfect, and you members of the Episcopalian Church, that your polity is not altogether without imperfection; and I would entreat you, my friend, though you are a member of an excellent body of believers, however excellent that church may be, not to think it is infallible. Go down on your knees, and ask God to teach you what you do not know, and to make you better than your creed; or else, in nine cases out of ten, you will not be worth much.

But, next, "great and mighty things, which thou knowest not," God will show thee *in providence*. A poor man is in trouble; he has not wherewithal to buy daily bread. Let him call upon God, and ask for it; and though he has never seen the Lord thrust out

his hand from heaven, or feed him by the ravens, or quench his thirst with water out of the rock, let him go down on his knees, and he will find that there are more wonders in providence than you and I have seen yet. In answer to prayer, we shall see how God's providence, though it is far beyond our ideas, is according to our prayers. There are many Christians who have been in great trouble, and have experienced a most marvellous deliverance in providence. If we have great troubles, let us bring them to our great God; let us cry unto him, and in providence we shall see "great and mighty things" which we know not as yet.

In the next place, very briefly passing over these points, "great and mighty things, which thou knowest not," God will show thee *in matters of Christian experience.* Let us search God's Word, and give ourselves to prayer, and then, in matters of experience, we shall see "great and mighty things" which we know not yet. A Christian is immeasurably beyond the worldling, and there is a possibility of a Christian becoming as much beyond himself as he now is beyond a sinner dead in sins. There is no telling how great he may become even on earth. I do not think we can ever on earth become perfect, but we know not how near to perfection we may come. We may not, whilst on earth, dwell in heaven; but who can tell how much of heaven may dwell in us whilst we are here? Did you ever sit down and read the Life of Herbert, or Whitefield, or Haliburton? After we have read such books, we say within ourselves, "What poor worms we are!" We feel like Robert Hall, who, when a certain minister came to see him, said, "I am so glad to see you! Mr. So-and-so has been here; he is so far above me, that I felt myself to be nothing in his presence, but now I begin to feel myself a man again." Have you never felt, when in the company of some great and mighty man, as if you were nothing at all? When I first read Henry Martyn's Life, I could not refrain from weeping for some hours afterwards, to think how much below such a life as his I was living. Yet you know not but that you may climb where these men did; the steps of the mountain of piety may be steep to look upon, but they are accessible to the feet of diligence. Go on, and you shall yet stand where Moses stood, and behold Canaan from the top of Nebo. Remember that you are as yet upon the lowlands; be not ashamed to acknowledge that you are desirous to climb upwards. Bend you knees, and God will show you in experience "great and mighty things" that you know not yet.

If any man is content with his own experience, it is entirely through ignorance. I will defy anyone to take Rutherford's Letters, and sit down, and after he has read them, to help saying, "Rutherford seems to have been like an angel of God; I am only a man, I never can stand where Rutherford stood." Frequently, when I return home from chapel on the Sabbath evening, I get down George Herbert's book of songs; and when I see how much he loved the Lord, it seems to me as if he had struck upon his harp the very notes that he had heard in Paradise, and sung them all again. Let us not be discouraged, we may yet become Herberts, and Rutherfords, and Whitefields; nay, there is no reason why we should not become as great as the Old or New Testament saints. There is no reason why

we should not be as great as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; for why should not every child of God, in these days, become as mighty a man of faith as was Abraham of old? Let us plead the promise of the text: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

And, to conclude, the same truth holds good *with regard to the universal Church of God.* I do not know whether you may have noticed that the devil, in his wisdom, has just tried to pervert all our services. My heart has been made glad by the opening of Exeter Hall for the preaching of the gospel! Never did my heart so leap for joy as when I heard that our brethren of the Church of England had begun to preach in Exeter Hall, though I felt sad when those doors were shut against them. Now our joys are blasted, and our happiness is clouded. It appears that, because some have lately endeavoured to turn to good account the earnestness of the people to hear the Word in their own churches and chapels, next Sunday we shall see the lamentable spectacle, in this great metropolis, of a place, not open simply for the preaching of the Word, but actually for a Sabbath Concert.* We shall read of multitudes assembled in a building, the property of one connected with a theatre; we shall hear of the people being gathered together, and there will be a person found who will profess to preach the gospel to them, and the "Messiah" will be performed as the great inducement for attracting them. Perhaps there is no person who feels more sorrow than I do that this fearful cloud has fallen upon us. The devil may one day open the Crystal Palace, the Museum, and every other place on Sunday; but the Lord reigneth; and if this nation shall be given up to Sabbath-breaking, let us not despair. God sits as the ruler in heaven; and, as surely as he is God, he will get the victory. The devil will outwit himself, as he has always done; Satan will fall into his own pit. I hope, however, that the Christians of Great Britain will be very earnest in calling upon God. Pray continually to the Most High, that he will prosper the preaching of the gospel to the multitude; but that he will never allow our entering into unconsecrated places to be twisted and turned to unhallowed uses, and that God will bring forth greater good out of the great evil, and so glorify himself, and thus show us great and mighty things that we know not.

I can only now beseech the Lord to pour his blessing upon each of you. May you be earnest in prayer, and constant in supplication; and if you have never known Christ yet, may he soon be made known to you by the Holy Spirit, and may your prayers be lifted up to heaven that he may show you his salvation, which is one of the "great and mighty things" which you know not now!

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* Mr. SPURGEON was referring to the arrangements which had been made for a sacred concert and a gospel address combined at the Alhambra Palace. Happily, the minister who took the service, abandoned it after one attempt, being convinced that more harm than good would result from it; but, unhappily, since then, not only have sacred concerts been regularly established, either with or without gospel addresses; but many places are open, on the Lord's-day, for secular concerts, at which there is not even the pretence of any religious service. Our comfort still is, as it was MR. SPURGEON'S over forty years ago, that "the Lord reigneth," and he will get the victory over all his adversaries.

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A DAY TO BE REMEMBERED.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 11TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 1st, 1882.

"And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house."—Luke xix. 9.

OBSERVE, dear friends, that our Lord spoke this sentence to Zacchæus. Some of us may have fancied that he said it to the objecting people, but he did not. They may have heard it, and their objection may have been answered by it, but the main purpose of our blessed Lord, in uttering those words, was not to answer objectors, but to comfort one who might feel dispirited by their murmuring remark. Therefore, "Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house."

It is always better to comfort believers than to answer cavillers. The cavillers scarcely deserve a reply, for they are pretty sure to find fault again; it is according to their nature to do so. But as for the poor distressed people of God, who gladly receive the truth, and yet have to endure unkind observations, let these be cheered, for has not the Lord himself said, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people"? Now, what could give Zacchæus greater consolation than for the Lord Jesus Christ to bear witness to the fact of his salvation? "Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house."

I fancy that I can hear some of you say, "We should count it the happiest day in our lives if the Lord Jesus would come and tell us that salvation had come to us." But, beloved, you cannot have him come, in the flesh, to say that to you, for he has gone away, to carry on his service elsewhere; among other things, he has gone to prepare a place for you who believe in him. But his Spirit is equally divine, and he is with us always; and you may have the Spirit of God bearing witness with your spirit that you are the children of God. Nay, I trust that you not only believe that you may have this witness, but that you actually have had it,—you have had that secret, silent, inward evidence which no man understands but the one who receives it; and you know, in your own soul, that you have passed from death unto life, because

the Holy Spirit has sealed that truth upon your heart. Therefore, dear friend, be joyful; yea, be exceedingly glad. If anything can make a man leap for joy, it ought to be the assurance of his eternal safety. If salvation has come to your heart, you ought to be as happy as an angel; I think that there are some reasons why you should be even happier, for an angel cannot know, by personal experience, the bliss of having his sins forgiven. You, who have realized this wondrous blessing, ought to cause the wilderness and the solitary place to resound with the melody of your thanksgiving, and with the music of your grateful delight you should make even the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Oh, what bliss it is to be assured by the Holy Spirit himself that you have passed from death unto life, and that salvation has indeed come unto you! May many of you enjoy that bliss from this very hour!

Now let us come directly to the text. "This day," says Christ, "is salvation come to this house." You will not forget the outline of the sermon, for it is very simple, and one that can be easily remembered First, *This day,—what?* Secondly, *This day,—why?* Thirdly, *This day,—why not?*

I. First, THIS DAY,—WHAT? What about this day?

Christ says, "This day is salvation come to this house." He seemed to cut that day out of all the rest of time, and to say concerning it, "This day,—this particular day,—on this very day,—is salvation come to you." Then, let this day be a holy day, and let it be a holiday; let it be remembered for many a year; yea, let it be recollected throughout all time and throughout eternity, too: "this day."

You know that there are some people who observe certain days which God has not ordained to be kept in any special manner. The Galatians did so, and therefore Paul wrote to them, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." We do not judge those who act in a similar way to-day; but, still, like Paul, we are afraid of them; that is to say, we fear they are mistaken in what they do. But there are some days which God commanded to be observed.

The first was, the day when the work of creation was finished, concerning which we read, "On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." The completion of the creation, when "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good," deserves to be remembered. And does not the new creation also deserve to be remembered? When the Lord creates in a man a new heart and a right spirit, shall we not say, one to another, "This day—this joyful day—this divine day—this new creation day—is a day to be observed very specially"?

It is clear, from the practice of the apostles, that the Lord intends us to observe the first day of the week, because that was the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead, the day of the completion of our redemption; and well may we commemorate the

complete redemption even more than the complete creation. Shall not each saved man specially celebrate the day when he was redeemed from sin? Shall he not count it worthy to be observed, with holy rites of preaching, praise, and prayer, and to be had in grateful remembrance as long as he lives? Each believer can say of the Lord's day, "This day, the Lord redeemed my soul out of the hand of the enemy, and set me free for ever." God has appointed but one day to be kept sacred above all others; that is the Lord's day. Your Christmas days, and your Good Fridays, and all such seasons, are only observed by man's ordinance; but the Sabbath is ordained of God, and that is to be observed as the emblem of rest. Now, surely, when a man comes into rest, and "we which have believed do enter into rest," then that day should be specially observed by him. It should become a Sabbath unto the Lord throughout the man's whole life,—that happy day in which salvation came to him. Let, then, "this day" stand as a special day in your calendar; mark it with a red line, if you like; or mark it with a golden seal, and let it be had in remembrance evermore.

Our Lord said to Zacchæus, "This day is salvation come to this house." From these words I learn, first, that *salvation is a speedy blessing*. It can come to a house in a day; nay, more, it can take possession of a man's heart in a day; nay, to go further, this great work can be accomplished in a single moment. I suppose that the new birth is actually a thing which requires no appreciable period of time;—a flash, and it is done. If a man be dead, and he is restored to life, there may be, in certain respects, a gradual operation upon that man, and some time may elapse before he is able to walk; but there must be a certain instant in which there is life in the man, whereas, a moment before, there was no life in him. The actual quickening must be a thing that is instantaneous, so that the working of salvation in a man may not only be performed this day, or this hour, or this quarter of an hour, but this minute, or even this second. Between light and darkness there is usually a period of twilight, and so there is in the soul; but, even in twilight, there is a measure of light, and there must be a moment when the first real beam of light begins to smite the ebonite darkness. So there must be a moment when grace first enters the soul, and the man, who before was graceless, becomes gracious. I think this is a good point to be remembered. You poor deluded souls, who hope to save yourselves by your own works, will have to keep on throughout your whole lives at that useless occupation, and even when you lie dying, you may be sure that you are not saved if you have been trusting to your own works. But he that believes in Christ Jesus is saved there and then, and he can joyfully sing,—

> "'Tis done! the great transaction's done;
> I am my Lord's, and he is mine."

This is a blessed fact,—that salvation can come to a soul this very hour; nay, as I have already reminded you, long ere the hand of that clock shall have reached the end of this hour, salvation may have entered into many hearts that are in this place, as truly as it entered into the house of Zacchæus.

Next, I learn from our text that *salvation is a discernible blessing:* "This day is salvation come to this house." Christ could see it, so that it was something which could be seen. Ay, and salvation was also seen by Zacchæus himself, and the fruits of it were soon seen by those who were in the house with him. Do not suppose that a man can be saved, and yet know nothing about the great change that has been wrought in him. It is not every man who can say for certain that he is saved, for faith is a thing of growth, and assurance may not come at once; but when a man is really and completely saved, he has but to use the proper means, and he may become absolutely certain of it. God the Holy Spirit is willing and waiting to give the full assurance of faith and of understanding to those who seek it at his hands.

Next, *salvation is a perfect blessing:* "This day is salvation come to this house." Well, but only as late as yesterday, that man had not even seen Jesus. Half an hour ago, he was climbing a tree, like a boy might have done, with no wish but just to get a sight of Jesus; and, now, is that man saved? "Yes," says Christ, "this day is salvation come to this house." "But, surely, you don't talk as positively as that concerning a man who came here to-night unsaved, and who has just trusted in Jesus. You must mean that he has reached a hopeful stage in his experience, and that, after several years, he may perhaps come to be really assured that he is a saved man." I mean nothing of the sort; I mean just what the text implies, which is that, the moment the Lord Jesus Christ crossed the threshold of the house of Zacchæus, his sins were forgiven him, his heart was renewed, his spirit was changed, and he was a saved man. "But," someone asks, "is anybody ever saved before he dies?" Yes, certainly. Were those persons dead of whom Paul wrote, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." They were living men and women, yet the apostle said that they were saved, and so they were. And, at the present moment, there are hundreds of thousands of believers in Jesus, upon the face of this earth, who are as truly saved now as they will be when they stand before the burning throne of God "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." In God's judgment, by virtue of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on whom they are resting by faith, they have been delivered from condemnation, they have escaped from the dominion of sin, and, in a word, they are saved. So, you see, dear friends, that salvation is a perfect blessing.

Notice, next, that *it is a much-containing blessing.* A man who believes in Christ is saved directly, but he does not fully know how much that word "saved" means yet. It is like a big box that comes into the house, and you begin to open it, and to take out first one thing and then another. "There," you say, "that is all." "Oh, no!" says somebody, who looks more carefully, "here is another packet." "Well, then, that is surely all; there is nothing but straw now at the bottom of the box." You put your hand in, and you cry, "Why! there is something more, and something more; what a boxful it is!" And what a boxful salvation is! You have

no idea what there is in it,—not only the pardon of sin, but justifying righteousness; not only that, but regeneration, a new heart, and a right spirit; not only that, but sanctification, adoption, acceptance, power in prayer, preservation, perseverance, victory;—yea, we are to be more than conquerors through him that hath loved us;—and all that is in the box. Ay, and more too; for we are to have a safe and happy departure out of this world, and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God our Father. All that is in the box; and all that had come into the house of Zacchæus when the Lord Jesus Christ came there; and you also have all that if you have Christ, for it is all in Christ. You know how he said, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father;" and Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "All things are your's: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." You will never get to the bottom of that box which bears the name "salvation." However great your needs may be, you may keep on taking out of it all that you require, and still there shall be more left; or, to change the figure, salvation is a springing well, from which the more you draw the more there is remaining, for drawn wells are always the sweetest, and usually the fullest. So, bring your buckets to this great well of gospel grace that is springing up at your very feet. Thus, you see that salvation is an all-containing blessing.

And, next, *it is a spreading blessing*, for salvation had come to the house of Zacchæus,—not to himself only, but to his wife, his children, and his servants, I hope it means. I never like to have the servants left out, though I am afraid that they often are. You servants who live in Christian families, mind that you do not get left out; for, remember that Noah, although he was a good man, did not get one servant into the ark with him and his family. Recollect Lot also; he was a good man of a very poor sort, and he only got his two children out of Sodom, and no servant went with them. It is a sad thing when you live and labour in the midst of Christian people, and yet you yourselves remain unsaved. I hope and believe that, in the case of Zacchæus, all in his house were saved when salvation came there.

But, once more, the salvation which had come to the house of Zacchæus, was *an abiding blessing*, for I never read that it went away again. If salvation comes to a man's house, it comes to stay there, as Christ said to Zacchæus, "I must abide at thy house." I can never believe in a man being saved for a time, and then falling from grace, and having to begin all over again. If he does not hold on his way to the end, it is clear that he never was really saved at all. As I have often told you, I can understand a man being regenerated, that is, being born again; but then some people tell us that it is possible for him, afterwards, to fall away from grace. But what is to become of him the next time? Why, I suppose that he must be re-regenerated,—born again and again; but I never read, in Scripture, anything of the kind. A man may be born again once, but he cannot be born again, and again, and again, and again, and

again, and again. That cannot be; when the work of regeneration is done once, it is done for ever. The work of man comes to an end, but the work of God fails not. That which is born of God is as immortal as God himself; the new life, that comes into the converted man from God, cannot die. How often do we ring in the ears of our friends those glorious words of our Lord, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Happy is the man to whose house salvation comes, for it comes to stay world without end.

That must suffice for the first head, This day,—what?

II. Now, secondly, we are to think of another aspect of the subject, that is, THIS DAY,—WHY? Why had salvation come to the house of Zacchæus that day?

I answer,—because, that day, *Zacchæus was called by effectual grace;* and whenever effectual grace comes to anyone, it brings salvation. "Wherefore, brethren," as Peter says, "give diligence to make your calling and election sure," for these are the "things that accompany salvation." If you are sure that you are called of God, you may be quite certain that you are saved, for "this day"—the day in which a man is effectually called by grace,—this day does salvation come to his house. Look, dear friends, God chose his people in his everlasting purpose, but salvation did not come to their houses that day. They knew nothing of it at that time, for they were not then born. Christ redeemed his people when he died on the cross, but salvation did not come to their houses that day, for the most of them were not then in existence. But, in the fulness of time, the gospel was preached to them, and they heard it; yet, in all cases, salvation did not come to their houses that day, for though they heard it, they refused it. But the moment that effectual grace says to anyone, "To-day I must abide at thy house," that grace at once gains admission, and salvation comes there and then to that man's house. You remember how the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: "Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." These great blessings are joined together, like the links of a chain, and you cannot pull them asunder. There is the calling that fits into the justification, and the chain is so made that the two links never can be separated. And then justification fits into glorification in such a way that you cannot possibly part them. It is no use for anyone to try to separate them. The devil may pull and hammer as much as ever he likes, but all his efforts will be in vain. I have sometimes likened that passage in Romans to a vast suspension bridge between earth and heaven: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." If you get your foot firmly resting on that great plank of effectual

calling, you may be quite sure that you will be able to cross all the rest of the bridge, and will most certainly reach the other side, and be "for ever with the Lord."

But how do we know that Zacchæus was really called? I answer in such a way that you may know whether you also are called or not. The call of Zacchæus was an effectual call, first, because *it was a personal call.* He was up in the sycomore tree, and he heard Christ call, "Zacchæus." "Why!" he said to himself, "That is my name; he is calling me." "Zacchæus, make haste, and come down." "Then he can see that I am up here; his description exactly fits my case." Now, when you come and hear me preach the gospel, I try to put the truth before you in a clear and very pointed manner. Some people say that it is wrong to be personal in preaching, but I always try to be as personal as ever I can. Yet I know that many of my hearers pass on to their neighbours and friends what I say to them. "Oh! that just fits Mrs. So-and-So," says somebody. No, my dear sir,—it is meant for you, but you will not take it home to yourself. But when the Lord Jesus Christ himself calls, then the man says, "Dear me! I do not believe that the preacher can see me right away here, yet he is speaking straight at me; I am sure that he is. How singular! He just mentioned something that cannot have occurred to anybody but me; he has exactly described my case." Those are the times when God is about to bless the soul,—when the man feels himself picked out from the rest of the congregation, and the gospel sharpshooter is just covering him with his rifle of grace. I pray that the blessed bullet of the gospel may find its billet in the very centre of your heart, and bring you down at the feet of Jesus as a weeping penitent. "Zacchæus!" The Lord knew that was the name of the man up the sycomore; and he also knows your name and your character; and when he means to call you by his effectual grace, he will hold your photograph up, and make you say, "Yes, that is my portrait; there is nobody else exactly like that."

Next, *it was a royal call.* Jesus said to Zacchæus, "To-day I must abide at thy house." One of our proverbs says, "Must is for the king;" and when *the* King speaks, he must be obeyed. We who are his ministers try to be very pressing and urgent; but when the Master himself utters the call, where the word of that King is there is power. I hope he is saying to someone here, "To-day I must abide in thy heart." Now you have come to the point when you also will have to say, "I must." There must be no turning back now, dear friend; you must not say to Christ, "Go thy way for this time." No; but you must say, "This time present is the time when I also will say 'must' as Christ says it to me." That is an effectual call when it comes as a royal mandate, a warrant from the King: "I must."

Then, next, *it was a call which produced immediate obedience.* The Lord said to Zacchæus, "Make haste, and come down;" and we read, "He made haste, and came down." I think I see him coming down that tree a great deal faster than he had gone up; he had not moved at such a rate as that for a long while; but he

scurried down, for he was told to make haste by One whose command compelled him to obey. When the Lord Jesus Christ calls any of you effectually, you will not put off your decision till the next morning; you will not say, "I will wait till I can get home and pray;" you will not even say, "I will wait till the end of the service, and then talk with a Christian person;" but your prayer will be, "Lord, help me to look to Jesus now. I yield myself up to thee this very instant. I am in a hurry about it. Lord, I am making haste to get to thee; make haste to come and save me. I would not delay a single second longer. I want to be thine alone, and thine at once." That is a mark of effectual calling, when immediate obedience is given to the call.

Another mark in the case of Zacchæus was, that *it was joyful obedience;* "He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." Oh, the joy of the heart that receives Christ when Christ himself does really come to the soul! The moment I believed in Christ, I wanted to shout "Hallelujah"; and if I had done so, I think that I might have been forgiven. The moment one believes in Christ, and knows that his sin is all gone, what extravagance would be extravagant under such circumstances? Is not the man justified in being joyful when at length his iniquity is blotted out, and his transgression is covered? It is a mark of effectual calling when we receive Christ joyfully.

In the case of Zacchæus, observe that *his obedience was complete,* for Christ said, "To-day I must abide at thy house;" and "he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully" at his house, for the people murmured because Christ had gone to be his guest. Now, dear friends, will you also receive Christ? That is the point. Are you willing to let him come unto you, and be your salvation? Are you eager that he should come? Do you beg him to come? Depend upon it, he will come to you when you are ready to receive him; but mind you do not trust for salvation to anything else or anyone else but Christ. Be satisfied with nothing but the ever-living Saviour to be your Saviour from first to last.

There was yet one more mark of the effectual calling of Zacchæus, and that was, that *he received Christ in a spiritual sense,* for he did not only take him into his house, but he took him into his heart. I know that he did so because he began at once to purge his heart by driving out covetousness. That was a splendid way of getting rid of it when he said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." Then he began to drive out his former grasping habit, for he said, "And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." That was clear evidence that he meant to receive Christ, in all his holy, gracious teaching, not merely as a man and a stranger; but, spiritually, as his Master, his Ruler, his Teacher, his Guide,—in a word, as his Saviour.

III. Now, lastly, THIS DAY—WHY NOT?

And now I change the day altogether, for I mean this very day when I am speaking to you, this first of October in the present

year of grace 1882. "This day." This day,—why not? Why should we not, "this day," give ourselves to Christ? I have tried to think of any reason why a man should not give himself up to the Lord Jesus Christ this day, and I cannot find one. Then, why should he give himself to Christ this day, on this particular day? I think I know several reasons why he should do so.

First, *it is late enough.* Surely you do not want to wait any longer. How old did you say you are, friend? Seventy-six? Eighty-six? What! as old as that, and not yet saved? You do not need one like me, so much younger, to urge you to speedy decision. Or did you say that you are not more than my own age,—not yet fifty? Well, I find it is quite late enough for me. There are certain influences and sensations creeping over me, which make me realize that I am somewhat different from what I used to be, and I expect it is the same with you. I think it is getting rather late in life for you to be still undecided. Perhaps some younger person says, "But I am only one-and-twenty." Well, that is late enough to be without Christ; it is a thousand pities that the devil should have had one-and-twenty years of your life. I was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ when I was fifteen, but I wish it could have been fifteen years before. Oh, that I had known and loved him as soon as I knew anything, and had lisped his name with the first words I ever uttered! I think every Christian will say the same. Whatever our age is, the time past may well suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh. Do not you think so, my friend? Have not you had quite enough of sin? What profit have you ever received from it? It is surely quite late enough for you to receive Christ as your Saviour.

And, further, *it is late enough in the year.* It seems to me, when the leaves are falling all around you, as if they all said to you, "We all do fade as a leaf." Is it not fully time to seek the Lord? I know of no season that seems more suited for pensive thought than just now when the year seems to be weeping itself into its tomb, and burying itself amid falling leaves. Now is the time to yield yourself to the Lord; there cannot be a better period than just now,—ere yet the year is fully gone.

The mercy is, dear friend, that, though it is quite late enough, *it is not too late for anybody here.* There is yet time for you to seek the Lord. It is a pity to have put the Lord off until you yourself have got into the sere and yellow leaf; but yet there is time to turn unto him. What! have you reached the eleventh hour of life? It is late, it is very late; but, still, it is not yet too late. It is not yet too late even if you are to die this week; and there are some out of this great company who will, I suppose, pass into the unseen world this week. Dear friend, I know not who you are, but you who stand nearest to your eternal destiny, it is not yet too late even for you. I pray you, clutch at once at the great mercy now offered to you. God help you so to do!

Every week, I have to hear of some out of our number who have passed away. There have been some this last week, and some whom I certainly thought we might have had with us for a long

time. They were, apparently, in good health, yet now they are to be buried at the beginning of the week, for they have gone from us quite suddenly. And why may not some of you be the next to be taken? Do not postpone your decision any longer; I would that we could say to-night, "This day, October 1st, some soul did receive salvation. Let the recording angel mark it down." The harvest is not quite over, though I thought it was. We down south have almost forgotten it, but there is a farming friend up with us to-day, who said to me, "We have not finished our harvest, for we have not got the beans in yet." So, you see, the harvest is not quite over, but I do not want you to have to say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." I would like to get some of you to come in with the beans, just with the last crop. Oh, that you might be brought to Christ just at this fag end of the harvest! The Master is willing that you should come to him even now, so do not delay. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation."

Remember, also, that *to-day is gospel time.* Still is Christ preached unto you, still is the door of mercy set open before you, still is the cry "Come" uttered by the Spirit, and the bride, the Lamb's wife, echoes it, "Come." Still the water of life is freely flowing for all who are willing to receive it.

Recollect, too, that *this is praying time.* You are still on praying ground; a prayer will find God yet. A traveller tells us that, when he was in the East, he saw the procession of a Sultan passing through a certain city. The monarch was there, all bedizened with gems and every kind of barbaric ornament, and surrounded by his guards. There was a poor wretch who wanted to get a petition to the Sultan, and he did not know how to manage it. He had no money with which to bribe the officials, and he could not force his way through the armed men; so, in his desperation, he got near enough to throw the petition down at the monarch's feet, but one of the soldiers stuck a spear through it, and he held it aloft, and that was the end of it, for the Sultan took no notice of the incident, he was much too great a man to attend to the petition of his poor subject. It is never so with God. Cast your petition, how you may, at his dear feet, he will answer it, and send you on your way rejoicing.

You are not only on praying ground, for to-night seems to me to be a very auspicious season, for it is *communion time.* God's people are presently coming together around his table to remember Christ. Will not you also remember him? We are about to receive Christ spiritually through the emblems of bread and wine which will set him forth to us. Why should not you also receive Christ, in a spiritual fashion, by faith, as your Saviour? Oh, that you would press through the throng, and bow at the feet of Jesus Christ, our Lord! If you do so, he will accept you, and again it shall be said, "This day is salvation come to this house." God grant it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE XVIII. 35—43; AND XIX. 1—10.

Chapter xviii. Verses 35—39. *And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace:*

"Hush!" they cried; "how can you disturb the blessed Master's discourse? Be quiet."

39, 40. *But he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood,—*

Prayer held him fast. Here is a stationary Saviour, held in his place by the cries of a blind man. Oh, the power of prayer! It stays the onward march of the Son of God: "Jesus stood,"—

40, 41. *And commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

It is a great thing to know what you really do want. There are some persons who are so blind that they do not know that they are blind; and because they say, "We see," therefore is their blindness the more intense. I fear that there is many a person, who professes to pray, yet who, if Christ should come into the room, and say, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" would not know how to answer the question. This man did; and he said, very briefly, and very clearly, but in a very full way, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

42. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight:*

Often, the blessing from Christ's lip is the echo of the prayer which fell from ours. The blind man said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Echo answered, "Receive thy sight."

42, 43. *Thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight,—*

See how the prayer, the word of Christ, and the immediate effect of it, all tally. "That I might receive my sight." "Receive thy sight." "He received his sight."

43. *And followed him,—*

Christ likes not blind followers: "and followed him,"—

43. *Glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

They seemed to be greatly impressed, but we shall see that some of them soon spoke in another fashion.

Chapter xix. Verse 1. *And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*

There was to be a miracle at each end of Jericho. Long before, it had been cursed; now it was to have a double blessing.

2. *And, behold, there was a man named Zacchæus, which was the chief among the publicans,—*

That is, tax-gatherers,—

2. *And he was rich.*

As they often were, for they farmed the taxes, and then squeezed every farthing they could out of the people.

3. *And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.*

That was a fortunate thing for him. We need not all wish to be so tall as some people are. Perhaps Zacchæus would not have gone up the sycomore tree if he had been a tall man; but the whole story turns upon something which many regard as a disadvantage: "he was little of stature."

4—7. *And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured,—*

There is a great contrast between this verse and the last one in the previous chapter: "All the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God." Here it is, "When they saw it, they murmured." Yet, very likely, many of them were the same people; certainly, they were the same sort of people that we hear of every now and then: "When they saw it, they all murmured." There are far too many of that kind about still; we do not quite know who they are, nor where they are, they have a sort of nondescript, mysterious existence that finds expression in the words, "They say so-and-so and so-and-so." They have been saying something about the minister, something about the Sunday-school, something about the Bible-class, something about your work and mine. You see, there always were such people about, and they always would talk, and their talk often took the form of complaining: "When they saw it, they all murmured,"—

7. *Saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.*

If he had not done so, he could not have gone anywhere, for all men are sinners. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But this man was a sinner above others, for he had sold himself to the hated Roman power, and was authorized to collect the conqueror's taxes from his own people; so, of course, in the estimation of the Jews, he was the worst kind of sinner that could be found anywhere.

8. *And Zacchæus stood,—*

And he did not talk at all like a sinner,—

8. *And said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;—*

Some of those saints, as they reckoned themselves, had not done anything like as much as that: "The half of my goods I give to the poor;"—

8. *And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

Which restitution was an act of justice; and when charity and justice go hand in hand, what more can we expect of men?

9, 10. *And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

And that day he had both sought and saved one of the lost ones, for he had found Zacchæus up in the sycomore tree, and he had brought salvation to the tax-gatherer's house. May he do the same for many who are here!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—660, 408, 658.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SORROWFUL MAN'S QUESTION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 18TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 8th, 1882.

"Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" —Job iii. 23.

I AM very thankful that so many of you are glad and happy. There is none too much joy in the world, and the more that any of us can create, the better. It should be a part of our happiness, and a main part of it, to try to make other people glad. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," is a commission which many of us ought to feel is entrusted to us. If your own cup of joy is full, let it run over to others who have a more trying experience. If you yourself are privileged to have the flashing eye, and the elastic step, and the bounding heart, be mindful to speak words of good cheer to such as are in bonds. Feel as if you were bound with them; and try to revive their drooping spirits. That is what I am going to aim at to-night, so you will excuse me if I bid "good-bye" for a while to you joyous ones, and just seek after those who have no such delight as you now possess; but who are, on the contrary, suffering from extreme depression of spirit. Sometimes, we must single out the wounded ones of the flock; that is what I am about to do; yet I feel sure that, while some few will be distinctly sought after, there will be something that may be of use to the many who are in a less sorrowful condition. The ninety-and-nine shall get their full portion although the shepherd goes specially after the lost one.

The question of our text was put by Job when he first opened his mouth in the extreme bitterness of his anguish: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" His case was so sad and so trying that life itself became irksome to him. I suppose that by "light" here he means the power to see the light, the life which lives in the light. "Why," he asked in his agony, "is that continued to a man when God hath filled him with sorrow upon sorrow?" The verses preceding our text are to the same effect: "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery,

and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?" The patriarch was weary of living; and perhaps we shall not wonder so much at his pitiful lamentation if we recollect the extreme distress into which he had been brought. He had lost all his property; by stroke upon stroke, all his wealth had been taken away from him. He might have borne that if it had been his only loss; but, close upon the heels of it had come sore bereavement. His happy children, for whom he daily cared, and whom he had tenderly loved, were all destroyed in a moment, while they were feasting.in the house of one of their brothers. The calamity seemed all the greater because it came in the very midst of their joys. Then, as if that was not trial enough, Job was himself smitten from head to foot with sore boils. If you have ever seen a person in that condition, I am sure that you must pity him. There is a dear friend of ours, now with God, whom I visited when he was in much the same state as that. Perhaps he had not to endure quite all that Job suffered, but something exceedingly like it had befallen him. The irritation, the pain, and the depression of spirit that come with that particular form of disease, all tend to make us treat very gently the petulant expressions of Job. We may not excuse them, but only he amongst us that is without fault may take up the first stone to cast at him. I will warrant that, if we had suffered as he did, and been brought to poverty, and left childless, and then been tortured as he was from head to foot, and even his wife rendering him no comfort, but, on the contrary, adding to his grief and woe, we might have said even worse things than Job did. For remember, dear friends, that he said nothing against God in the time of his deepest sorrow. He cursed most vehemently the day of his birth, and wished that he had never existed, or that he might speedily pass away to sleep with the generations that are dead; and he used unwise and foolish expressions, but any of us might have used far worse words if we had been in his case, so we will not condemn him, but we will see what lessons we can learn from his experience.

I think that Job's experience teaches us the very small value of temporal things. To have spiritual blessings, and to enjoy them, is one thing; but to have earthly things, and to enjoy them, is quite another thing. You may have an abundance of them, and yet they may be utterly tasteless to you, or they may even be bitter as gall to you, and you may curse the day that gave them to you. I am sure that it is so, because Job speaks thus concerning life, which is the chief of all earthly things. It is true, although Satan said it, "All that a man hath will he give for his life;" yet we may be brought into such a condition that we may wish that we had never been born. Life itself may become so wearisome to us that we may even wish to escape from it, that we may be at rest, as we hope. Job had once enjoyed every comfort that heart could desire, and he still had this blessing of life left to him; but even that had become curdled and soured, the last thing to which a man usually

clings had become distasteful and disgusting to him, so that he set no store by it, but longed to get rid of it. O beloved, seek eternal treasures, for there is no moth that can eat them, no rust can mar them, no fermentation or corruption can injure them; but, as for the things of time and sense, if you do possess them, use them as though you had them not, and never make them your gods, for they are but as a shadow that passeth away in a moment. They come, and they are gone; and if you make idols of them, the Lord may permit you still to retain them, but take away from you all power to enjoy them. You may have abundance, and yet not be able to relish even the bread you eat, or the drink that refreshes you. You may have a loss of health, or a loss of all power to be happy, though everything that men think to be the cause of happiness may be laid abundantly at your feet.

With this as a preface, I now come to my text, and ask you to notice, first, *the case which raises the question;* secondly, *the question itself;* and, thirdly, *answers which may be given to the question:* "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?"

I. First, notice THE CASE WHICH RAISES THE QUESTION: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?"

That is to say, "Why does God permit men to live *when their souls are under deep depression and gloom?* Why does he not let them die at once? When their days are spent in weariness, and their nights yield them neither rest nor refreshment,—when they look upward, and see nothing to give them hope, or onward, and behold nothing but that which is even more dreadful than the present,—why is it that God continues life to those who are in such sad circumstances?" Well, dear friends, if life were not continued to any but those who are bright of eye, and fleet of foot, and joyous of heart, how few would live! And if, the first time that darkness fell upon a man's pathway, he were to be permitted to die, well, then, the whole population of the globe would soon be swept away. If our murmuring and petulance demanded that we should die rather than suffer, then we should soon pass away, and be gone. But that is the case which is supposed in Job's question,—If a man finds himself entirely in the dark, if God's presence be completely hidden from him, and he can find no joy in anything whatever, and his spirit is tossed to and fro with worries and perplexities, the question is, "Why does he continue to live?"

Yet, further, the man here described is in such trouble that *he can see no reason for the trouble.* His "way is hid." Job could not perceive, in his own case, any cause for the distress into which he had been plunged. As far as he knew, he had walked uprightly. He had not sinned so as to be now suffering the result of his sin. He had not committed a crime, else he would have understood the punishment when it came upon him. He looked back upon all that he had done, and he could not, at his first glance, see in himself any cause for his affliction. Nor, indeed, dear brethren, was there any cause why all these things should have happened to Job by way of

punishment, for the inspired record concerning him is that he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil."

Even the devil himself, who kept a sharp look-out with his malicious eye, could not find any fault whatsoever with which he could charge Job. He deserved the character which God had given to him, though Satan did insinuate that he had acted from interested motives. He asked, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" That question has always seemed to me to be a very crafty one, yet very foolish, for if it could have been proved that Job had feared or served God for nought, then the devil would have said at once that God was a bad master, and that there was no reward for those who served him. But now that he finds God putting a hedge of roses round about Job, and sheltering him on every side, he declares that Job was only pious because he found it profitable. He could find no other fault with him; and even that accusation was not true.

Job, on his part, remembered how he had fed the widow, and succoured the fatherless,—how he had acted justly towards his fellow-creatures in the midst of an unjust generation,—and how, amidst a mass of idolaters, he had worshipped God, and God alone. He had never kissed his hand in adoration to the moon, as she walked along her shining way in all her queenly brightness, nor had he ever bowed himself down to the host of heaven, as nearly all around him had done. He stood alone, or almost alone, in that age, as a true and faithful servant of Jehovah; yet his sorrows and trials were multiplied. And so, his way was hidden, he was hedged in by God, and he could not make it out. You know, dear friends, that it is often a great aggravation of our troubles when we do not know why they come. A man, when he is ill, usually wants to know what is the nature of his disease, and how he came to be attacked by it. When we see a person suffering, we generally ask, "Where did you catch that cold?" or, "What was it that brought on that congestion?" We always like to know the cause of the complaint, and Job wanted to ascertain the reason for his trouble, but he could not find it out, and this rendered it all the more mysteriously grievous to him, and therefore he enquired, "Why do I continue to live, when I have come into such darkness as this?"

It was equally trying to Job that *he did not know what to do.* There seemed to be nothing that he could do. He was stripped of all his earthly possessions. Those ashes where he sat formed his uncomfortable couch, and the sole property that remained to him was a potsherd, with which, in his desperation, he began to scrape himself because of his sore boils. What could he do in such a case as that? There was no physician there to cure him of his sad complaint.

True, there were his three friends; but all that they could do, or, at least, the best thing they did, was to sit still, and say nothing. When they opened their mouths, it was only to pour vinegar into his wounds, and to increase his agony tenfold. What could poor Job do under such circumstances? His very helplessness tended to increase his wretchedness.

Am I addressing anyone who is in that kind of perplexity? I think I hear someone moaning, "I don't know which way to turn. I have done everything I can think of, and I cannot tell what is to come next. I sit in darkness, and can see no light. Why I am brought to this pass, I cannot tell; or what is the reason for it, I cannot make out anyhow. If I could light upon some great and grievous fault whch had brought me where I am, I could understand it; but as it is, I am in thick Egyptian night about it all, and I know not what to do. Why does a man continue to live when his way is thus hidden, or hedged up?" If that is the way you talk, you are in very much the same sort of plight that the patriarch was in when he uttered the mournful question which forms our text.

What was still worse to Job was that *he could not see any way out of his trouble.* He said that God had hedged him in, not with a hedge of roses, but with a barrier of briars. Whatever he tried to do, he found himself obstructed in doing it. And there are men, now in this world, whose sorrows are the more grievous because everything they do to alleviate their distress seems only to increase it. Their efforts are all fruitless; they are like men who have become entangled in a bog; the more they struggle to get out, the deeper they descend. They strive to their very utmost, but it is all in vain; they rise up early, they sit up late, and they eat the bread of carefulness mingled with their tears; but there is a blight on all that they do. Nothing prospers with them; they are at their wits' end. Then they begin to cry, "Oh, that we had never been born, rather than that we should have been born to such trouble as this! 'Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?'"

I have thus stated the case which gave rise to Job's question, and I should not wonder if I have, at the same time, stated the case of some who are here. Do not think it has been a waste of time for any of you to hear this sorrowful description of a very sad condition of heart and mind. If I should only have been describing one such individual, let us all feel sympathy for him or for her, and let us unite in breathing the silent petition, "Lord, bring thy servant out of prison."

II. Now, secondly, we are to consider THE QUESTION ITSELF: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" In other words, Why is the light of life given to him who is in the darkness of misery?

Well, first, let me say that *it is a very unsafe question for anyone to ask.* Brethren, we are sure to get into mischief as soon as we begin catechising God, and asking "why?" and "wherefore?" Such questioning comes not well from our lips. He is the Potter, and we are the clay in his hands. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" God's eternal purposes are a great deep, and when we try to fathom them, we utterly fail. Divine Sovereignty is an ocean without a bottom and without

a shore, and all we can do is to set our sail, and steer by the chart which he has given us, and all the while believe that, as we sang just now,—

"E'en the hour that darkest seemeth,
Will his changeless goodness prove;
From the mist his brightness streameth,
God is wisdom, God is love."

Voyaging in that fashion, we shall be safe indeed. But to try to cross such a sea, without rudder, or chart, or compass,—this is a venturesome piece of sailing which we had better not undertake. I tremble whenever I have to think of the wondrous ways of God; I mean, when I have to think of them after the manner of the reasoner, and not after the style of the believer. Well did Milton describe the fallen spirits sitting, in little groups, discussing predestination and the counsels of the Eternal. You know how Paul answers the man who calls in question the dealings of God either in providence or in grace: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Job received his answer when the Lord spake to him out of the whirlwind, and said, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" What God said to him was not so much a vindication of the ways of providence, but a revelation of his matchless power as the Creator and the Ruler of the universe; and, though men may not like to hear it, yet there is, in the thunder of God's power, an answer, which, though it may not always answer the sceptic, must ultimately overpower and silence him. As for God's child, he sits down in the shadow of that black cloud which is the canopy of Deity, and he is well content to be still in the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. Imitate him, my brother, and do not keep asking God the why and the wherefore of what he does. It is an unsafe thing to ask such questions.

Next, *it reflects upon God.* In this question of Job, there is really a reflection upon the wisdom of the Almighty. He has given the light of life to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God hath hedged in, yet Job asks, "Why did he do it?" I think that, far too often, we indulge our questionings of divine providence. Is God to stand and answer to you and me for what he does? Is he bound to tell us the reason why he does it? Job's friend Elihu said, "God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." If there be his equal anywhere, let him meet him in the field, and they shall speak together; but to us worms of the dust answers shall not be given if we haughtily put questions to him of "what?" and "why?" and "wherefore?" To accept the Lord's will with absolute submission, is after the manner of the Son of God himself, for he prayed, in the hour of his greatest agony, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." But to cavil, and to question, is after the manner of the prince of darkness, who is ever seeking to dispute the sovereignty of God. Therefore, beloved, let no question of ours reflect upon the Lord's love, or the dispensations of his providence.

Further, we may rest quite certain that *there must be an answer*

to this question, a good answer, and an answer in harmony with the character of God. If there are men and women to be found still sitting in the darkness of grief and sorrow, and we ask why they are allowed to continue to live, there is a reply possible to that enquiry, and a reply consistent with boundless grace and infinite compassion; but, mark you, that reply may never be given, or, if it is given, we may be incapable of understanding it. There is much that God does that could not be understood, even by those great men, of modern times, who would fain sit on the throne of the Eternal, and judge him,—

> "Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
> Rejudge his judgments, be the god of God."

I say that there are some answers, which God might give if he pleased, but which even they could not comprehend with all their wit and wisdom, and you and I must often come to a point where we have to stop and say, "We cannot understand this;" and we shall be still wiser if we add, "Nor do we wish to do so." Brothers and sisters, I, for one, have had enough of searching into reasons; I am perfectly satisfied to accept facts. I am ready to bow my reason before the Lord, and to accept whatever he says. If I do not, how little shall I ever know! What is there that I do really understand? I confess that I see profound mysteries about the commonest phenomena around me; I cannot fully comprehend anything when I get right to the bottom of it. There is, on every hand, a deep which I cannot fathom; how, then, shall I understand the ways of God, and measure him with my finite mind, comparing so many inches with the Infinite, weighing so many ounces against the Omnipotent, and reckoning so many seconds in contrast with the Eternal? No, brethren, for such calculations, you have nothing to measure with; you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, yea, bottomless. So, the less of such questions as Job's any of us ask, the better, for, even if we had the answer to them, we might not be able to understand it.

Let me remind you also that, however important this question may seem to be, *it is not the most profitable question.* I have heard of a farmer, whose boy said to him, "Father, the cows are in the corn; however did they get there?" "Boy," he replied, "never mind how they got there; our work is to get them out as soon as we can." That is our main business also, to get the cows out of the corn; how they got there is a matter that can be thought of by-and-by when we have nothing else to do. The origin of evil is a point that puzzles a great many people; but I hope you will not worry your brains over that question; if you do, you will be very foolish. But if you are wise men, you will not trouble yourself so much about the origin of evil, as about how to conquer it, in yourself, and in others. Get the cows out of the corn, and then find out how they got in, if you can, by so doing, prevent their getting in again.

There will be space enough, and time enough, and better light, to discuss these questions when we get up yonder before the throne

of the Eternal. If their solution is of any real consequence to us, we shall get them solved then; but, meanwhile, we are colour-blind; or, if we are not, it is so dark and so misty here, and we have so many other more pressing matters to attend to, that we had better leave these whys and wherefores, and rely on the infallible wisdom and the infinite love of God. If he has done anything, it is quite certain that it is right and just; yea, if it has come from his dear hand, it is also gracious and kind. There is more sublimity in being like a little child in the presence of the Eternal than there is in trying to ape the Deity, for that is but a mockery,—a thing to be despised;—nay more, it is the greatest insult we can offer to God, and it is a pity and a shame that any of us should so live and act. Put aside everything of the kind, I implore you, and in very truth submit yourselves unto God.

III. But now, in the last place, speaking to the sorrowful person, I want to mention SOME ANSWERS WHICH MAY BE GIVEN TO HIS QUESTION. "Why do I continue to live," asks he, "in such sorrow as this? Why does not God take from me the light of life when he does not permit me to enjoy the light of comfort?"

Supposing that you are a child of God, I will give you one answer which ought to satisfy you, though, perhaps, it will not if your spirit is rebellious. *God wills it.* If you are one of his true children, that is all the answer that you will require; and you will say, with those early Christians, "The will of the Lord be done;" and with your Lord himself, "Not my will, but thine, be done." It was enough for Christ that his suffering was in accordance with the Father's will, so he bowed before him in unquestioning submission; and shall not you, the disciple, be content to fare as your Master did? Will not you be perfectly satisfied with that which satisfied your Lord? It is the will of the Lord; then what need is there of any further question if you are his child?

But supposing that you are an unconverted person, and you say, "I cannot bear to live in such sorrow as this, why is my life prolonged?"—the answer is, "*Because of God's mercy to you.*" Where would you go to be better off than you are here? You who have no hope in Christ, and yet who say, "I wish I were dead," you know not what you are saying. You wish you were dead? But what would be your portion after death? What! Do you really wish to hear that dread sentence which must be passed upon you if you die unregenerate: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"? Do you really desire to feel the full weight of divine justice? Ah! I hope that you are not so foolish. You have spoken in petulance, and do not mean what you have said. It may be hard for you to live, but it would be harder far for you to die, and then to live for ever in a death that never dies. God grant that you may never know that awful doom!

Moreover, the answer to your question is that the Lord spares you *because he would fain save you.* You are kept alive that you may hear again that voice of mercy which says, "Repent ye, and be converted." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." God comes to you in this time of suffering, that he may

stop you in your sin, and make you think. Even to the most careless and giddy among you, during the poignancy of your grief, he says, "Now, my prodigal child, thou hast wasted thy substance in riotous living, thy belly is hungry, and thou hast nothing with which to fill it; arise, and go unto thy Father, for he will receive thee." Come, then, sorrowful one, it may be that thy sorrows will end when thy sins end; certainly, when thou comest to Christ to be forgiven, thou shalt find divine consolation, even if all thy griefs do not at once disappear. Anyhow, it would be better to be whipped all the way to heaven than to be carried down to hell "on flowery beds of ease." Pray this prayer, "O Lord, let me enter into life with one eye and one hand, halt or maimed, rather than, having two eyes and two hands, to be cast into hell!" This is one answer to your question; the Lord lets you live, even though it is in pain and grief, because he has purposes of love and mercy towards you. Therefore, be not anxious to die; but be thankful that you are still permitted to tarry upon gospel ground. Nay, do not be content to tarry there, but fly at once to the God of grace; look this very instant to Jesus, for—

> "There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
> There is life at this moment for thee;
> Then look, sinner—look unto him, and be saved—
> Unto him who was nail'd to the tree."

One believing glance of the eye to him who is the sinner's Substitute, and all transgression is forgiven; therefore, yield yourself unto him, trust to his finished work, and eternal life is yours. And when you have that unspeakable blessing, why need you sorrow more?

As for the child of God, to whom I now again speak, if you ask, in a timid, childlike way, "Why do I continue to live in such sorrow as I have to endure?" I would, as your brother, try to answer you. First, it may be that all this trouble has come upon you *to let you know what is in you.* None of us know what there is in us until we are put to the test. We are wonderfully sweet-tempered until somebody touches one of our sore places; and then, ah, me! there is not much sweetness of temper left after that. We are remarkably patient until we get a sharp neuralgic pain, perhaps; and then, where is all our boasted patience gone? We are very generous until we ourselves are somewhat pinched, and then we become as tight-fisted as others whom we have condemned. We do not know what is really in us while all goes smoothly and well; but sickness, and sorrow, and bereavement, and poverty, and hunger, will soon let us see what we are. They make a mental or moral photograph of us, and when we look at the picture, we say, "Oh, no! that cannot be our likeness;" but we look again and again, and then we say, "Alas! it is even so; but we did not know we were like that. Now we see our faults and our follies. O Lord, thou hast searched us, and tried us, and shown us the wicked ways that are in us; now purge us from them, and make us clean and pure in thy sight!" That is one reason, and a very good reason, for sharp affliction,—to let us see ourselves as we really are.

The next is that, *often, our trials bring us very near to our God.*

Your children run down the meadow to play, and they get a good way off from home in the sunny day, as they ramble along gathering their buttercups and daisies; but, by-and-by, the sun sets, and night comes on, and now they cry to be at home. Just so; and you, in all your pretty ways of pleasure in your happy home, though you are a child of God, sometimes forget him. Sorrowfully must you remember that sad fact. But now the night comes on, and there is danger all around you; so you begin to cry for your Father, and you would fain be back to fellowship with him; and that is a blessed trouble which brings us near to our God. Christ's sheep ought to be thankful for the ugly black dog that keeps them from going astray, or fetches them back when they have wandered from the Shepherd. Perhaps Christ will call that black dog off when he has answered the Master's purpose, and brought you near his side.

Dear child of God, anything that promotes your sanctification, or increases your spirituality, is a good thing for you. I have had my share of physical pain, and perhaps more of it than most who are here; and I bless God for it. If it comes again, I ask him for grace to bless him for it then; and now that it has gone for a while, I freely bless him for it, for I cannot tell you all the good that it has wrought in me. Oh! how often a proud spirit has been cut back by affliction and trial, like a vine that is made to bleed, that the clusters that followed the pruning might be all the better and richer! The mown grass is very sweet and fine; and so, often, are believers who have been deeply tried. This tribulation, as Paul says, "worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Wherefore, bow humbly before the Lord, my tried and afflicted friend, and see at least some of the reasons why he thus puts you in the dark chamber of tribulation.

Perhaps, dear brother, you are being very greatly tried, more than most people, *to fit you to be an example to others.* The Lord means to make a veteran of you, so you must be the first in the breach, or you must lead the forlorn hope. He puts you on the hardest service because he wants others of his children to be able to learn from you. I do not know that we should ever have heard anything of Job if it had not been for his troubles; he was a most respectable Eastern farmer, with a considerable estate, very much like a great many country gentlemen we have in England, who may be heard of at the Quarter Sessions, or the corn and cattle market, but nothing more will be known of them unless you go to the parish church, and see some memorial of them stuck up there. Job would have been much the same sort of man as that,—an Oriental magnate, who would have lived, and died, and been forgotten; but now his fame will last as long as the world endures, and "ye have heard of the patience of Job." You have all heard of it, and Job is one of the undying names. So it may be with you, beloved. You are, perhaps, to sail through seas of trouble to reach your crown. God means to use you in his service, and make you a blessing to others, and a teacher of others, by passing you again and again through

the fire. One of the ancient warriors said, "I cannot use in battle a sword that has not been ofttimes annealed; but give me a Damascus blade that has been so prepared, and I will cut through a coat of mail, or split a man from head to foot at a single stroke. It gets its temper and keenness of edge from having slept with the flames again and again." So must it be with believers. Full often, they are unfit for God to use till they have been sorely tried.

Perhaps, dear friend, the Lord is putting you through all this trouble—(only I hardly like to say it aloud, I must whisper it in your ears somehow,—) *because he loves you more than anybody else.* Dear Samuel Rutherford, when he wrote to a lady who had lost, I think, seven children, congratulated her, and said, "I am sure that the Well-beloved has a strong affection for your ladyship, for he will have all your heart. He has taken away all these children that there may not be a nook or a corner for anybody else but for him." So the Lord loves you much, and he is testing you to see whether you can bear his will,—whether you love him so much that you will take up your cross, and deny yourself, just as, sometimes, architects will ask for their work to be put to the severest possible tests. "Yes," they say, "see what it will really bear." No doubt Stephenson felt great joy when the heaviest train went safely across his tubular bridge; and other engineers have said, "Yes, put on as much pressure as you like; it will stand it." Fathers often take delight in the athletic feats of their sons, and princes revel in the brave deeds of their warriors; and so does the Lord delight to see what his people can do, and he often puts upon them more and more, to prove whether they love him so much that they can bear it all for his sake. Did not the Lord do this to let Satan see that Job did love his God, and would still say, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? . . . The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." We cannot tell what a blessing must come from such a state of heart as that.

It is very possible, dear friend, also, that God is putting you through all this trouble *that he may enable you to bear great prosperity.* Job was to have twice as much as he had ever had before, and that was a very great deal, for he said that he washed his steps with butter, and the rock poured him out rivers of oil; but how much richer he was when everything was doubled! Job was hardly fit to manage such a large estate as that until he had been made to see the vanity of it all, and to get nearer to his God. So, dear friends, you are going to be pressed, and squeezed, and tried, in order that you may be fitted to come right out into the front rank, and to be magnified and made much of by the Lord your God. I have noticed this kind of thing happen more than once. I have seen a man suddenly taken from the very dregs of the people, and put up to preach, and he has been popular all at once. Nobody has abused him, nobody has said a word against him; but, before long, he has passed completely out of sight. He could not bear the weight that was put upon him, and gave way. You have seen others, who have been called of God to preach the Word, and they have been

abused year after year. They could not say anything that was not perverted; they were called mountebanks, impostors, and I know not what. And then, when happier days came, and almost all men spoke well of them, they could bear it, for they had learnt to despise alike the flatteries and the abuse of men. Now, something like that must happen to all God's servants who are to be greatly honoured. If they are to bear prosperity, they must go through the fire first. Perhaps that is what the Lord is doing with you, my dear friend; if so, be content with your lot.

And, once again, do you not think that the Lord means thus *to make you more like his dear Son than other people are?* Some other Christians have not as much trouble to endure as you have. No; why is it? You know how an artist can, if he likes, dash off a picture. There! A little red, and a little blue, and so on, and it is done; and away it goes! Ay, but when he wants to paint something that will be observed and admired, then he takes more pains. See how he works at every part of it; note what care and what trouble he takes with it. It is the same with the lapidary or the sculptor when he has choice work in hand; and you are, I hope, the kind of material that will pay for cutting and carving; and the Lord is using his chisel upon you more than he does upon most folk. He wants to make you just like his dear Son; so now he is chipping out a thorn-crown, and you must wear it round your brain. He is fashioning the image of his Son out of the block of your renewed nature, and you must patiently bear the blows from his hammer and chisel till that work is done.

Finally, if I cannot tell you why all this trouble falls to your lot, I know it is right, for *the Lord has done it*, and blessed be his name. Aaron held his peace when his two sons died. He got as far as that in submission to the will of the Lord; but it will be better still if, instead of simply holding your peace, you can bless and praise and magnify the Lord even in your sharpest trouble. Oh, may you be divinely helped to do so! Let every troubled soul march out of this place feeling, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Rise, dear friend, out of all despondency and despair, shake yourself from the dust, and put on your beautiful garments of praise and joy, remembering that—

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

You can see the tracks of the martyrs along the road you are journeying; better still, you can see the footprints of the Son of God, your Lord and Saviour. Therefore, you may rest assured that you are on the right road, so press bravely forward on it, and, in due time, you will come to that place of which Job said, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest;" and you shall be for ever without fault before the throne of God. May he grant this happy portion to you all, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A PRESSED MAN YIELDING TO CHRIST.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 25TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, October 12th, 1882.

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."—John ix. 35—38.

LAST Sabbath morning*, I spoke to you concerning one who was impressed into the King's service. That was Simon, the Cyrenian, who was compelled to bear Christ's cross. He was not a volunteer, but a pressed man; yet, I think that, after he had been forced to bear the cross, he willingly carried it, and I hope that he afterwards became a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, strange to say, here is another pressed man; for I do not think that this man, whose eyes had been opened by Christ, had thought of becoming a believer in the Son of God until the Lord Jesus found him out. Before he had reached that point; indeed, before he knew that the prophet who had opened his eyes was the Son of God, the Pharisees had cast him out of the synagogue, so that he was compelled to bear the cross for Christ although he did not then fully know Christ, and certainly had not believed upon the Son of God. Yet, in his case also, it appears that he cheerfully took up the cross which had been at the first forcibly laid upon him. It may happen that there are some persons here who are in a similar position, some who have been ridiculed for being Christians even before they are Christians, who have been mocked at merely because they go to a place of worship, though as yet they have not yielded themselves to Christ; well, if that is the case with any, seeing that the cross is laid upon their shoulders, I do trust that they will not throw it off, but that they will bravely bear it for Christ, and freely suffer what, up till now, has seemed to them to be a piece of injustice, for they have been treated as if they

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,683, "The Great Cross-Bearer, and his Followers."

were believers in Christ, when really they are not yet on the Lord's side.

This man, then, bearing Christ's cross in a certain way, was cast out of the synagogue, and then Christ found him, and blessed him. Observe, dear friends, where Christ began with him; for it will show us where and how the blessing usually enters. The door by which the richest of heaven's favours must come to us is indicated by our Lord going to that door, and opening it. He said to the man, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" So that faith in the Son of God is the gate of benediction. Faith is that window of agate and gate of carbuncle by which the divine light of Jesu's love comes streaming into the soul. This is the way by which God's mercy enters the heart of man, and therefore the Lord Jesus Christ himself begins there; and in all our dealings with the unconverted, it will be wise for us also to begin there. That is the place where the decisive battle will have to be fought; for, upon the believing or the non-believing on the Son of God, the eternal destiny of each individual will turn. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." That wrath abides even now upon him if the life of God is not in him. Let us hammer away at that all-important point of faith in Christ. This is the Thermopylæ of Christian experience. If this pass can be stormed and carried, we can capture the citadel of men's hearts; but if unbelief continues to guard that narrow passage to eternal life, and to hold it against the gospel and its invitations, and exhortations, and promises, and threatenings, then nothing whatever can be done. So, in this enquiry of our Lord, we have most instructive teaching. His object, no doubt, was to bless this man by working in him saving faith, and therefore he said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

I think our text will help us, first, to speak of *true faith,—how it is known;* secondly, *true faith,—how it progresses;* and thirdly, *true faith,—how we can promote it.*

I. First, I want to speak concerning TRUE FAITH,—the faith that saves,—HOW IT IS KNOWN.

First, *it is absolutely essential that it should be faith in the Son of God.* Our blessed Lord knew that this man believed in him as a prophet; so might he not have been content with that? No; because, to believe in Christ merely as a prophet is not saving faith. It may be a step towards salvation, and it may lead up to it; but the faith that is absolutely necessary is that belief in him as the Son of God; and he who does not believe in the Deity of Christ has not a Saviour who can save him. The work of saving a soul is a divine operation, and no one but a divine being can accomplish it. It is he who sitteth upon the throne who saith, "Behold, I make all things new." There cannot be anyone except the Creator who can create; and the Creator must, in every case, be God. To save a soul, there must be a work performed which is analogous to the resurrection; but, in order to raise the dead, there must be the presence and power of God. It is one of those operations which it is not

conceivable can be performed by an angel or by any created being. The Highest alone can accomplish it; has he not said of himself, "I kill, and I make alive"? The power of life and death must rest with God alone. Hence, then, the work of salvation needs a power nothing less than divine. He who believes in Christ as a mere man has not believed in a person who can give him salvation; and Christ cannot accomplish the stupendous task if he be only man, for the Saviour must be God.

There is no true and logical standpoint, in reference to the Deity of Christ, except one of two things. Either our Lord was the Son of God, equal with the Father, or else he was an impostor, for he most distinctly claimed that he was the Son of God. In the chapter preceding our text, at the 54th verse, we read that Jesus said to the Jews, "If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God." Then they took up stones to cast at him because he said that he was the Son of God; and, in this case of the blind man whom he had healed, he took pains to find him out that he might communicate to him in private the fact that he was himself the Son of God. He never withdrew his claim to the Deity; if he had only said to the Jews, "No, I am not the Son of God; you are mistaken in supposing that I said I was. The expressions I used are not intended to convey that idea," then they would not have crucified him. This was the chief point of their quarrel with him, and I must again say that either he was God, or he wilfully misled the people by using words which made them think that he was God. His words have led millions of Christians, from those days until now, to worship him as God; and they were perfectly justified, by his utterances, in doing so; and if he meant anything less than that, then he was a deceiver. But he did really mean that he was God, and it is our joy and glory to rest in him as being alike the Son of Mary and the Son of Jehovah himself, "Light of Light, very God of very God," co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; and here we feel that we can rest for our soul's salvation, we can lean with our whole weight on One who is indeed "mighty to save." Seeing that all power is his, and that he is equal with God, he can and he will save all those who put their trust in him. Do not any of you, I beseech you, be content with any faith less than that. If you have any sort of faith which does not recognize Christ as God, do with it as the man did with the bank note, when he found that it was bad,—he laid it down, and ran away from it, for fear anybody should suspect him of being its owner. Put away every kind of confidence that is short of faith in the Son of God, and abhor it, for it is a damnable delusion; and may the Lord bring you fully into this blessed state of salvation through believing on the Son of God!

A second point about saving faith is that *it rests upon a knowledge of him.* This man said to Jesus, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" He was not one whose notion of faith was that he need not know what he believed. The Church of Rome seems to inculcate some kind of implicit faith (or credulity) which can exist apart from knowledge; but how can I believe that which

I do not know? Paul puts it thus, "Faith cometh by hearing." You must first hear and know what it is you are to believe before you can believe it; otherwise, your faith is vain, like that of the man of whom I have sometimes spoken, who said, "I believe what the Church believes." "But what does the Church believe?" "It believes what I believe." "Then what do you and the Church believe?" "Why, we both believe the same thing." That is not the kind of believing that can save the soul. It is through the knowledge of Christ that we are saved. To know Christ is sometimes said to be analogous to believing in Christ. You must know what it is that you have to believe; a faith that does not know is no faith at all. Read through the Epistles of John, and mark with your pencil every time the word "know" is used. The apostle makes that word "know" come in again and again, for a man must know that which he is to believe; and hence this man says to Christ, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"

For my part, I could never be content without unquestioning certainty as to my soul's salvation. Do you think that is more than a man ought to wish for? Are any of you at ease while you are afraid that you have a mortal disease working within you? Oh, no! You want to know, from a qualified physician, the truth about your case. And if it were whispered in your ear, at this moment, that your house was being broken into or was on fire, would you sit still here, and not trouble yourself as to whether the report was true or not? Would you not want to go at once, and see for yourself? If you knew that you bought an estate, some time ago, but you have since heard that the title to it is a very uncertain one, in fact, that, in all probability, you will lose all you have paid for it, would you not say, "I ought to have taken care to be certain about the title, and I would not have bought the estate if I had not felt that the deeds relating to it were all right"? Well, then, if you desire certainty about your bodily health, and about the safety of your house, and about the validity of your title-deeds, can you afford to go without certainty as to your soul's affairs? No, you cannot; therefore, rest not till you have it. If you have various questions about your spiritual condition, boldly face those questions, and answer them; but never let any questions about your eternal welfare be such that you dare not face them, and do not wish to search out the answers to them. Pry to the very bottom of them; and, better still, ask the Lord to search you, and know your heart, to try you, and know your thoughts, and to lead you in the way everlasting; and be not content till you can truthfully say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." This man, of whom I am speaking, knew that Christ had opened his eyes, therefore he must be at least a prophet. He also knew, further, that whatever that prophet told him must be true, for the man who had opened his eyes must have been sent by God, and God does not work miracles by liars. He said to himself, "This man is undoubtedly a faithful person, or God would not employ him in such a wonderful work as that of opening the eyes of a man who was

born blind;" and then he stood perfectly prepared to receive whatever might be spoken by this prophet of whom he knew something, though he did not know enough to understand what was meant by the Saviour when he asked, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" He, therefore, sat as an enquirer at the Saviour's feet, waiting for something to be told him which should enable him to believe.

You, dear friend, may not be in exactly the same condition that this man was in; but, still, your case may be, in many respects, a parallel one. You say, perhaps, "I wish, above all things in the world, that I could believe in Christ." Do you intend to sit down, and try to make yourself believe in him? That would be a very unwise thing, because faith is not wrought in the soul in that fashion. Suppose it was rumoured, at the present moment, that there had been another massacre in Alexandria, and that our troops had been driven out of the city; how would you decide whether the report was to be believed or not? Would you sit down in your pew, and say, "I will try to make myself believe it"? Well, you might come, by a process of reasoning, to some sort of conclusion as to whether it was or was not a likely thing; but the more sensible plan would be to enquire what foundation there was for the report; and if, on going to the War Office, you were informed, by someone in authority, "Yes, there has been a very great disaster," well, then, knowing the facts of the case, you could believe. The enquiry at headquarters would be the way to ascertain the truth of the report, and just so is it in connection with believing in Christ. If I am to believe in him, I ask, with this man, "Who is he?" and until I know who he is, it is idle for me to talk about forcing myself to believe in him.

Now listen. He in whom you are asked to believe for salvation is, first of all, himself God. Then, in infinite mercy, he came and took upon himself our nature, and dwelt among men. He voluntarily came,—being God,—but he was also sent of God, appointed and authorized to be God's Ambassador to man. He was, in addition to being sent of God, anointed of God, for the Spirit of God rested upon him without measure, qualifying him for his work. The life he led here on earth was unique, there was never another like it, and the imagination of man cannot write the history of another man that shall be at all comparable to the life of Christ. It stands apart in a lone, simple majesty, utterly inimitable, absolutely perfect. Then he died, and by that death he for ever put away the sin of his people. He took upon himself the sin which he had never committed; he was numbered with the transgressors, and he suffered as if men's transgressions had been his own; he died, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." And God has accepted those sufferings as a propitiation for all who believe in him; and now, this is the witness of God concerning him, that he has raised him from the dead, and taken him up to his throne, and made him to sit there, at his Father's right hand, where, at this moment, he is making intercession for all who come unto God by him. And, now, our prayers are accepted through him; and the

infinite blessings, which are his, he distributes among us; and he is shortly coming again, with sound of trumpet, and attended by myriads of saints and angels. As he ascended from Olivet, in like manner also will he descend to earth again. King of kings and Lord of lords shall he be in that day; "and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." He is God, he still lives, it is the living, reigning Christ whom we preach unto you. He lives in glory, and he also lives here by the presence of his Holy Spirit, who is with us, and who is to abide with us evermore; and it is upon him as God incarnate, as Saviour, crucified, risen, and gone into the glory, that you are asked to place your soul's confidence. If you would learn this truth more fully, read the four Gospels, and the Epistles, and ask the Spirit, who inspired the writers of them, to explain and apply them to you. That is the way to obtain faith. Many a man has been reading in the Bible the story of the cross, and so he has believed in Jesus. Many another has heard about the Saviour, and so has been led to believe in him. It is the simplest thing in the world to believe upon trustworthy evidence; and when we get the evidence of Christ's life and death manifesting the glory of his person, the graciousness of his character, and the efficacy of his atoning blood, then are we led to believe in him. True faith is based upon knowledge of Christ, as it was in this man's case. Take care, dear friends, that you always remember that simple but important truth.

And, further, *true faith always expresses itself to the Lord.* This man, when he had believed in Jesus, said, "Lord, I believe." True faith ought also to express itself to men, as Paul puts it, in writing to the Romans, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation;" or, as the Master himself puts it, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Therefore, the confession before men ought not tc be neglected in any case; yet I fear, and hope, that there are some pilgrims who steal into heaven, scarcely known by men to be Christians,—at least, not avowed as such by open profession. I do not recommend that dodging behind the hedges, and getting to heaven along back roads; that is a bad plan, but, still, I trust some have managed it, though with much trouble and loss to themselves; but, in every case, every one who has believed has made the confession of that faith to the Master himself. He has said to Jesus, as this man did, "Lord, I believe," even though he has added, with another man, "Help thou mine unbelief." He has said to Jesus, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." There has been a personal acknowledgment, as we sometimes sing it,—

"My faith looks up to thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour divine."

It is a very vital point about true faith that it thus recognizes its obligation to speak to him, and to avow itself to him. How sweetly doth faith, sometimes, come up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved, and owning to him that she is his, and he is hers! She

cannot help making this confession; she would be untrue to herself and to her Lord if she did not do so.

In one respect, we are better off than this man was, for we have many divine promises to help us to believe in Christ. Have you ever noticed, dear friends, how much we live upon the promises of our fellow-men? In buying a small article at a shop, you pay your twopence for it across the counter; but, the larger the business transaction gets to be, the less there is of metallic currency in connection with it, and then you often pay each other in promises. The commonest form of a promise is a bank note; and it is worth while to observe how much a bank note is made after the model of God's promises. How does the wording of this bank note run? It is headed, "Bank of England;" and it begins, "I promise." You take this note readily enough instead of five golden sovereigns, because you read on it, "I promise to pay the bearer;" and God's promise is payable to "the bearer." Whoever has the promise in his possession, whoever has faith enough to lay hold of God's promise, may read it in this way, "I promise to pay the bearer." I remember when I first snatched at one of God's precious promises; I could hardly hope that I had any right to it, for I felt myself so utterly unworthy, but I snatched it up, and ran with it to the Bank of Faith, and as soon as I presented it, received its full value. God always honours his own promises; here is one: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Go to him with that gracious message, and it shall be fulfilled to you whoever you are. The note says, "I promise to pay the bearer." If a sweep takes that note to the Bank of England, he will get the money for it;—I mean a sweep in character as well as by trade, for the declaration on it is, "I promise to pay the bearer."

What does it next say on the bank note? "I promise to pay the bearer on demand." That is how all God's promises run: "on demand." It is worthy of note that, in the olden time, when the Lord had made many promises to his people, he added, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;" as though the fulfilment of the promise was delayed until it was asked for. No doubt many of God's great and precious promises are not realized by you and me because they are not presented to the Lord as we should take a note to the bank to get it cashed. We do not enquire of God as much as we ought. You hear of enquirers going to see the minister; that may be a good thing, but the best sort of enquirers are those I heard before I came up here to preach to-night, when some good earnest souls met downstairs in the lecture-hall to enquire of God for a blessing, and to ask him to help his servant to speak the Word with power.

Now, coming back to this bank note, I daresay you would not mind having a pile of paper, of this kind, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and then you would say to yourself, "Now I am a rich man." But you have not a single farthing there, you have only a promise "to pay the bearer on demand the sum of five pounds." "Ah!" you say, "but that promise is good all the world over." Whose promise is it? Well, it is signed by the chief cashier, but he only signs it "for the Governor and Company of the Bank of England." That is where

the value of the promise lies; and it is our comfort to know that we have a noble name written below all God's promises, for the Lord Jesus Christ has signed them all in God's behalf, for the great Governor of heaven and earth, who has no need of any "company" to be joined with him, for his sole resources are fully equal to the fulfilment of every promise that he has ever issued. Now, if we treat men's promises with respect, and pass them from hand to hand as if they were genuine gold, and we constantly do so; shall we not treat God's promises with something more than respect, and trust them with implicit confidence? Will any man have the impudence to say, "I have faith in a note signed by the chief cashier of the Bank of England, but cannot trust a promise that is certified by the Lord Jesus Christ himself"? Shall I consider that bank note to be as good as the money it represents, and yet, when I hold in my hand God's Word, signed, and sealed, and ratified by the sprinkling of the very blood of his dear Son, shall I dare to say, "I find it hard to believe in that word"? If I talk so, I shall grieve the people of God, and what is far worse, I shall grieve the Lord himself.

II. Now I turn to the second part of our subject, which is, TRUE FAITH,—HOW IT PROGRESSES.

Very often it has a very small beginning. Saving faith does not always come on a sudden. Some men are saved, as Saul of Tarsus was; they are struck down in the midst of their sins, and converted in a remarkable and unusual manner; but with many others there is, first, a faint twilight; then, by-and-by, a little more; and, at last, the sun has fully risen upon them. Perhaps you cannot tell when it did actually rise; but you know that it has risen, for there is the light and the brightness of its shining.

In the case of the man of whom I am speaking, *faith began with a preparedness to believe.* His eyes had been opened, and he was thereby made ready to believe anything that Jesus might tell him. And there is many a man who, looking back upon God's goodness to himself, and God's goodness to his father and mother, and God's goodness to gracious people in general, and thinking of the holy and lovely character of Christ, has in that way been prepared to believe when the truth was clearly set before him.

This man went a step further on the right road, for *he desired to believe.* He said, "Who is he, Lord,"—not, "that I might know about him, and talk about him,"—but, "that I might believe on him?" He had a desire to possess true faith; and there are many like him, who desire to believe, but who have not exercised faith in Christ. This is very wonderful, but it is true. Of all things in the world, to believe in Christ is one of the most simple, yet that is the reason why many find it so difficult. If it were difficult, it would seem easy to them; but, being easy, it appears difficult. Some of you, dear friends, when I try to describe how we come to trust in Christ, will twist and turn what I say, even if I make it "as plain as a pikestaff." You think, "Oh, he must mean something very different from what he says!" You really cannot get this idea into your heads,—that you have just to depend upon Christ, to trust him, and then you are saved, for "he that believeth on the Son hath

everlasting life." Whenever we use a metaphor, or figure, or illustration to try to explain the simplicity of faith, straightway somebody finds a difficulty even in that. When I have been trying to catch a sinner, I find that he has as many hiding-places as there are days in the year. I have stopped up one after another, and I have said to him, "No, salvation only comes through believing." "Yes, sir, I know, but——" and down he runs into another hole. When I have dug him out of that, and fancied I should surely catch him, he says, "Oh, yes! we are to trust the Saviour, but——" and again he is off. Somehow, men seem very ingenious in trying to find out reasons why they should not be saved, and all their foolish ingenuity seems to be employed in attempting to escape from this blessed divine simplicity, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." May God the Holy Spirit lead them to believe in him! He must lead them, for no man can see Christ until his eyes are divinely opened. We may put the truth as plainly as ever we can, and preach it so that we think we cannot be misunderstood; but men will misunderstand us still, even those who desire to believe in Christ, until the Holy Spirit shall work effectually in them.

This man went still further on the right road; for he not only desired to believe, but *he made enquiry in order that he might believe.* I put it to you very simply, just now, with regard to making enquiries concerning a certain piece of news. Well, this man did the same. He said to the Master, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" If sinners would only make enquiries about the Saviour, they would soon trust in him. You will find, as a rule, that the people who rail at the New Testament, have never read it. If they would but read it, their cavils might soon come to an end, and be followed by a blessed faith in Christ; but, instead of doing so, they read what some objection-manufacturer has said about the Bible, instead of going to the Book itself, and seeing what it really teaches. If I were very thirsty, I do not think that I should abstain from going to a well because somebody told me that it contained bad water; but I should go, and see, and taste for myself; and when a soul gets very thirsty, if it is wise, it goes to the Word for itself. I advise you to do that, dear friends. "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

When this man had made his enquiry, and received Christ's answer, *he soon became decided.* He said, "Lord, I believe." I like that simple, clear avowal of faith. So often, when we are conversing with an enquirer, he says, "Yes, sir; I hope I believe." Oh, dear! is that all you can say? "Well, I trust I believe;" and so faith is surrounded by fog. "I hope I believe; I trust I believe." Man, don't you know whether you believe or not? You may know it; one thing I know, you have no business to go to sleep till you do know this once for all; for, if you are not a believer, you are an unbeliever. There is no middle state between the two; and if you are an unbeliever, you are "condemned already," because you have not believed in the name of the only-begotten

Son of God. This matter of believing ought never to be left in doubt at all, but it should be definitely settled, so that you can say, with this man, "Lord, I believe."

Then, further, *he acted as a believer:* for "he worshipped him." This proves how his faith had grown. I should like to ask you who are the people of God when you are happiest. I think you will agree with what I am going to say; and if you do not, it will still be just as true to me. My happiest moments are when I am worshipping God, really adoring the Lord Jesus Christ, and having fellowship with the ever-blessed Spirit. In that worship, I forget the cares of the church, and everything else; and, to me, it is the nearest approach to what it will be in heaven, where, day without night, they offer perpetual adoration unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Hence, what a memorable moment it was for this man when he worshipped Christ! Now, if Christ was not God, that man was an idolater, a man-worshipper; and you and I, instead of being regarded as very excellent people, by those who call themselves "Unitarian Brethren," should be condemned as idolaters. If Christ was not God, we are not Christians; we are deceived dupes, we are idolaters, as bad as the heathen whom we now pity. It is making a man into a God if Christ be not God. But, blessed be his holy name, he is God; and we feel that it is the supreme delight of our being to worship him. We cannot veil our faces with our wings, for we have none; but we do veil them with his own robe of righteousness whenever we approach him. We cannot cover our feet with our wings, as the angels do; but we do take his blood and his righteousness both as a covering for our feet, and as wings with which we fly up to him; and though as yet we have no crowns to cast at his dear feet, yet, if we have any honour, any good repute, any grace, anything that is comely, anything that is honest, we lay it all at his feet, and cry, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

III. Now I come to the third point, which is this, TRUE FAITH,—HOW TO PROMOTE IT.

Brothers and sisters beloved, there are many of you who are constantly looking out for souls, and trying to bring them to Christ; you have here an example of what you may do in endeavouring to lead them to exercise faith in Jesus.

First, if you have any choice as to those to whom you go, *seek out the oppressed.* You are to go, so far as you can, "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" but if you may specially look for some more than others, seek out the sick, the sad, the weary, the poor, the broken-down ones, and especially such as have been put out of the synagogue. When our missionaries have gone among the Brahmins in India, they have had a few converts; but the most blessing has been given among the poor people who have no high caste of which they are proud. When the gospel was taken to them, they gladly received it. The gospel worker will be wise if, instead of shunning those whom even nominally religious people put away, he looks after them first. They are likely soil for

the good seed of the kingdom to grow in, and bring forth fruit. Our Lord Jesus Christ, at Sychar, did not go to some goodly matron, who was an ornament to her sex; but you know where he found the woman who became his disciple and missionary, and you know what kind of woman she was; and, to this day, he delights to go about, as Whitefield used to say, "sweeping up the devil's castaways." Those whom nobody else wants, and nobody else will have, our blessed Lord and Master delights to receive. Do you, therefore, look after those out-of-the-way sinners. I like that expression, those out-of-the-way sinners; because our Lord Jesus Christ is the High Priest "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." Out-of-the-way sinners are the sort he came to save; therefore, look out for them, you who would follow the example of the great Soul-Winner.

Then, next, when you come to close quarters with them, *ask them questions*, as Christ did. He said to this man, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Put the enquiry pointedly and personally. Here am I, up in the pulpit, firing the gospel gun, and the shot flies where God directs it; but you, downstairs, who love the Lord, can, as it were, hold a pistol close to the sinner's head. Take them separately, one by one; and make them "stand and deliver." Put the question as our Lord did, "Dost *thou* believe?" "See, friend," you can say, "the minister has been preaching about faith. 'Dost *thou* believe?'" This is what nine people out of ten want,—somebody to come and make a personal application of the truth to them. They are like soldiers out upon the battlefield; they lie there, wounded, bleeding, dying. Close by, there is all that is needed to bind up their wounds, and plenty of it; then, why do they lie there in agony? They need personal attention, and it is your business, as an army surgeon, to go and put on the lint, and bind up the wounds. Oh, that we had multitudes who would do this, and that all God's people were constantly looking out for opportunities of making a personal application of the truth to those who hear it! "Dost thou believe?" said the Lord Jesus to this man, and by that question he held him fast. That is the way to win souls, begin with a personal question.

Then, *be ready to answer enquiries.* This is what our Lord himself did when he revealed himself to this man. Tell them all you know; and if you cannot tell them all they want to know, try to bring them to somebody more advanced in spiritual things than you yourself are, so that, with prayer, and patience, and wise instruction, he may lead them to Christ.

Next, *pray to the Lord Jesus Christ to reveal himself to them,* for that is the way faith comes. We cannot speak of Christ as he should be spoken of; but, when he reveals himself, then the sinners see him. All the portraits of a beauty never touch the heart like one glance from her eyes; and all the portraits of Christ, that ever were painted by his most admiring disciples, never make such an impression on the heart of man as when once he says, as he said to this man, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." None but Christ himself can preach Christ to the full. He

must reveal himself, or the Spirit must reveal him, or else men do not see him.

Finally, *glorify Christ by your own personal testimony.* Recollect that wondrous intercessory prayer of our Lord, in which he said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." It was so kind, yet just like him, not to say, "through *my* word," though it is his word that we are to proclaim; but we get it into our hearts, and so appropriate it that, when we utter it, we speak out of our own heart, and soul, and then it becomes our word, too, and so sinners believe on Christ through our word. Go on speaking your word,—that is, Christ's word spoken by you, for this is how to win souls for him.

Now, in closing, I want to begin again, and give you another little sermon altogether, only I shall not be able to preach it to you, but just to give you the heads of it, and leave it with you.

The first head is, *when you are believing, mind that you believe in Jesus himself.* "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" or is it somebody else in whom you are believing? Is it merely what others say about Christ that you believe? Is it your own opinion of Christ? Or is it really the Son of God upon whom you are believing? When you are believing, believe in Jesus himself.

Next, *when you are enquiring, enquire of Jesus himself.* This is a beautiful thing, to my mind. Here is a man asking Christ about Christ,—asking Jesus, "Who is he?" and, all the while, speaking to the very person about whom he was enquiring. He did not know it was Jesus, yet he had gone to the very fountain-head. Now, perhaps some of you have made enquiries of Christian people, and you have read the Bible, and prayed, and yet you cannot find Jesus; then go direct to him, by faith, and say, "Lord, show me thyself." That is the way to learn of him. Have I a book of which I cannot make head or tail as I read it? If I knew where the author lived, I would call on him, and say, "Dear sir, will you kindly tell me what you mean by this expression? I cannot understand it." That is the way to find anything out; go to the fountain-head. So, go you to Christ always; and, when you are enquiring, enquire of Christ himself.

Next, *when you are seeking Christ, ask Christ to reveal himself to you,* for there is nobody who can reveal Christ as Christ can reveal himself by his blessed Spirit.

And, next, *when you are confessing your faith, confess it to Christ himself.* Say, as this man did, "Lord, I believe." Say to your minister, or to your mother, or to your friends, "I believe;" but take care, above all the rest, that you say, "Lord, I believe."

And, lastly, *when you are worshipping, worship Christ himself:* "He worshipped HIM," and no one else. Take care that your reverence and adoration are not given, in any degree, to the church, or to any person in it, or to any priest, or minister, or anything created or made; but worship God, and God in Christ Jesus; and the Lord bless you, beloved, for his name's sake! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COMMUNION WITH CHRIST.—A BAPTIZING SERMON.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 1ST, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, early in the year 1858.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"—Amos iii. 3.

THE expression "walking together" is often used in Scripture as a figure for communion. "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." Communion, if it be thorough and entire, implies *activity*. It is not merely contemplation, it is action; and hence, inasmuch as walking is an active exercise, and walking with a man is communion with him, *active* communion with him, we see how walking comes to be the picture of true communion with Christ. An old Puritan said, "It doth not say that Enoch returned to God, and then left him, but he 'walked with God.'" All his journey through, he had God for his companion, and lived in perpetual fellowship with his Maker.

There is also another idea contained in the term "walking together." It is not only activity, but *continuance*. So, true communion with Christ is not a mere spasm, not just an excitement of ecstasy; but if it be the work of the Holy Spirit, and if it be enjoyed by the healthful soul, it will be a continual thing.

It implies also *progress;* for, in walking together, we do not lift up our feet, and put them down in the same place, but we proceed nearer to our journey's end; and he that hath true communion with Christ is making progress. It is true that Christ can go no further towards excellence, for he hath already attained perfection; but the nearer we get to that perfection, the more fellowship we have with Jesus; and unless we progress, unless we seek to be more childlike in faith, more instructed in knowledge, and more diligent in service, unless we seek to have more zeal and fervency, we shall find that, in so standing still, we lose the presence of the Master; for it is only by following on with the Lord that we continue to walk with him. It will, therefore, very readily strike you how walking with a person is an excellent figure for communion with him; and how

the term "walking with God" is the best expression for fellowship with God. Hence, our text implies, by its very form, that two cannot walk together except they be agreed; and it teaches us, therefore, that unless we be agreed with Christ, we cannot attain to the sweet state of communion with him.

We shall, first, notice *the agreement* here mentioned; we shall, secondly, try to notice *the necessity for this agreement;* and then, thirdly, we shall ask all Christians to *seek after this agreement with Christ* that they may have full communion with him.

I am not addressing myself so much to the world without as to the church within. When we are preaching the gospel of salvation, we preach that to the world; but communion is like the holy of holies. Salvation itself seems to be but as the court of the priests, but communion is the innermost place, that which is within the veil, and into that none but the Christian can be allowed to enter.

I. First, then, Christian, we shall endeavour to show thee WHAT IS THE AGREEMENT which must subsist between thy Lord and thyself before thou canst walk with him. We will do this in a very simple way. We shall keep to the figure, and we shall see that there are certain things necessary to enable one person to walk with another.

First, then, it is quite certain that, if we would walk with Christ, *we must walk in the same path.* Two men cannot walk together if one turns his head in one direction, and another turns his head the opposite way. If one should turn to the right, and the other to the left, they cannot walk together, although they may arrive at the same end by devious roads; but they cannot walk together unless they walk along the same road. It is true that they can have a little conversation even if they are some yards apart; but if one walks on one side of the road, and the other on the other, we should think that their communion was rather distant, and their love rather chill. But, the nearer they walk in precisely the same road, the more are they enabled to hold fellowship with one another.

Now, child of God, albeit thou canst not be saved by thy good works, and thy salvation does not depend upon thy works, remember that thy communion doth. It is impossible for thee to have fellowship with Christ except as thou art obedient unto his commands. Let a Christian err, and he will be pierced with many sorrows. Let the child of God forsake the way of God, let him, as alas! we oftentimes do, go down by the stile to By-path Meadow, and he will not have his Master go down By-path Meadow with him. If we will be self-willed, and choose our own path, we must go our own path alone. If, for some seeming pleasure, or some fancied gain, instead of following the fiery-cloudy pillar, we follow the will-o'-the-wisp of our own desires, we shall have to go alone, and in the dark, too. Christ will go with us anywhere where duty calls us. If duty should call us into the burning fiery furnace, the Son of man will be there; if it should lead us into the lions' den, he will be there to shut the lions' mouths. He would not have gone there with Daniel if he had sought, by neglect of duty, to avoid the threatened destruction. Although the Lord would go with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego even into the heat of the burning fiery furnace, yet,

if they had bowed down to the image, he would not have gone with them. "If ye walk contrary to me," saith the Lord, "I will walk contrary to you."

Here I must guard what I have said, lest I should be misunderstood. I do not mean that Christ forsakes his people so as to destroy them; but he forsakes them so as to take away their communion with himself. For again I repeat that, although salvation doth not depend upon good works, communion hath this dependence, and cannot be enjoyed between Christ and the soul that is full of sin. A man may have much sin about him, and yet be a saved man; and much of frailty and imperfection cleaveth to us all. But if we are living in sin, if we are in any way whatever breaking the commands of God, to the extent of our sin there will be just that extent of separation between our souls and Christ. Sin may not kill us, but it will make us sick; it will take Christ's right hand from under our heads. Take care, therefore, Christian, that thou walkest in the steps of thy Master; strive to be obedient to his law; righteously, soberly, and godly do thou live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Be thou like Caleb, who followed the Lord fully. Endeavour in every way to learn his will, and then to do it; in all thy Lord's appointed ways pursue thy journey. Remember all his ordinances, and perform his every precept; resign thyself to his every dispensation; be thou not as the horse or mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle lest they come nigh unto thee; but be thou guided by the Lord's own eye, run thou in the way of his commandments, and thou shalt find them a delightful road. This is the first point; those who walk together must go the same way.

Further, in going the same way, *they must go with the same motive.* Two persons may be going the same way, but suppose they are going for very opposite ends. There is a lawyer walking side by side with the man whom he is going to fleece. Let the poor man know that he is to be robbed at the end of his journey, and there will not be any communion between the two travellers. Suppose two men are going together, and one is about to bring an action against the other, there will not be any communion between them. Suppose they are going to fight with each other, there will not be any communion between them. Suppose the two are going to the same election, intending to vote for opposite candidates, they will not be likely to hold very sweet conversation with one another, albeit they may go in the same way. So, it is needful that we should not only go in the same road, but with the same motive.

Perhaps you ask, "Is it possible that we can go with Christ in the same road, and yet not with the same motive?" Certainly, it is. You see a man who appears to be quite as holy as a Christian; he seems to be as obedient to the Lord as the man who really follows the Master. As for ceremonies, he is the very first to observe them; as for the duties of morality, he attends to them most scrupulously; but ask him why he does all this, and he says it is because he desires to save his soul by it. Immediately, he and Christ are at arms' length; Christ calls such an one an anti-Christ,

and they are sworn enemies. You are trying to save yourself, are you? Then you are to be a saviour, while Christ is a Saviour; then you and he are at enmity; but if you are travelling on this road to be saved by grace, desiring to show forth your thanks with your lips, and in your life, then you do not wish to rob Christ's kingly or priestly office of any of its dignity; you do not desire to set yourself up as another king in Zion. But if you are walking in this road with a motive contrary to Christ, you cannot hold any communion with him.

There is very blessed communion with Christ to be enjoyed in the Lord's supper; but if anyone comes to the Lord's table merely with the thought that it may do him good, and save his soul, there is no communion with Christ for him, because that is not Christ's object; and it is the same with baptism. That ordinance is a blessed means of communion with Christ in his death and burial; but if anyone desires to be baptized, supposing that the observance of the ordinance will save his soul, then there is no communion. If anyone attaches more to the act than that Christ has commanded it, and, therefore, it is our duty to fulfil it,—the moment a man supposes any efficacy in the water, and in the body being buried therein, then the communion ceases; for unless we come to anything with Christ's motive, or with a motive which is congenial to Christ's heart, we are not capable of walking with him. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed, not only in the way they walk, but also in the object with which they walk in that way.

Once again, two persons may walk the same road, and they may walk with the same purpose, *and yet they may not be able to speak to each other, unless they travel the same pace.* If one person shall travel home very swiftly to-night, and another, who lives in the same house, goes creeping home very slowly, perhaps they will go down the same streets, yet they will say nothing to one another, because one will be at home long before the other. So, we must agree in the pace at which we travel. Why is it that many Christians hold no fellowship with Jesus? It is because they travel to heaven so slowly, that the Lord Jesus leaves them behind. They are so lukewarm, so cold, so indifferent, they have so little zeal, so little love, they have so little true desire to glorify God, that the swift heart of Jesus cannot be restrained to tarry with them.

"Oh!" saith one, "I travel as fast as I can, but I am only a poor feeble creature; I often creep when I see others run; and when I run, I often see others flying." Beloved, Christ does not measure your walking by the speed at which you go. If your desire be slack, then the Lord Jesus will leave you, and travel on before you; and you will probably find the whip of affliction behind you, goading your soul to travel more swiftly. John Bunyan has a good picture. He says, "If you send a serving-man for medicines, and he goes as fast as he can, perhaps he rides on a sorry jade of a horse, and he cannot make it go fast; but the master does not measure the pace by the rate at which the horse goes, but by the rate at which the servant wishes the horse to go, and he says, 'That man would go fast if he could; if you put him on a horse that had some mettle

in him, he would be back, and bring the medicines.'" So is it with our poor flesh and blood. It is an ill pace at which we can ever go with such a sorry thing to ride on; but the Lord Jesus measures our pace, not by the actual distance traversed, but by our desires. When he sees us kicking and spurring, as it were, in prayer, pulling at the rein, and toiling to make our poor flesh and blood rise to something like devotion and zeal, then he accepts the will for the deed, and Christ stops to keep company even with us who are such poor disciples. But let our desires be cold, let us become lazy, let us do little or nothing for Christ, what wonder if the Lord Jesus says, "This man observeth not my words, and keepeth not my sayings; I will not sup with him, and he shall not sup with me. I will give him enough comfort to keep him alive; I will give him enough spiritual food to keep his soul from actually starving, but I will put him on poor diet until he turns to me with full purpose of heart, and then I will take him to my bosom, and show him my love"?

There is one thing more. You can suppose two persons travelling on the same road, with the same intentions, and at the same pace; yet they do not walk together, so as to hold any fellowship with each other, *because they do not like each other*. Where there is no love (and that, perhaps, is the fullest meaning of the text), there can be no communion. Unless two be agreed in heart, they cannot walk together. You know some of our very excellent Hyper-Calvinistic friends. Now, suppose one of them meets an Arminian, you cannot suppose for one instant that there could be any conversation between them, except it were some jangling, and abuse of each other. Suppose some good strict Baptist brother speaks to us, who have more enlarged principles. He smites us with his heavy weapons, and cuts us down for the great sin of loving all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcoming to the Lord's table all whom we believe the Lord has received. But, so far as communion is concerned, our brother would be obliged to go on the other side of the road; there must be, he thinks, a little distinction and a little difference kept up, for the honour of his own views. And we know that there are some brethren, who have a peculiar obnoxiousness of temper; they seem to be covered with bristles and sharp quills, to prick and annoy any and every person who happens to come in their way. You cannot commune with them; it is impossible for you to walk in the same road with them, for you would feel it better to hold your peace all the way, because they would be sure to misunderstand what you said. There must be an agreement in heart, an agreement in opinion, or otherwise two cannot walk together.

O believer, hast thou agreement of heart with the Lord Jesus? Say, dost thou love Christ, and dost thou think a great deal of him? Dost thou ever seek to magnify him, and speak well of his name? Dost thou think him the chief amongst ten thousand, and altogether lovely? And dost thou feel that he also has a good opinion of thee? Hath he said to thee, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee"? Has he spoken soft words to thine heart, which have caused thee to think that his bowels of compassion have

yearned over thee? Ah, then, communion is easy with thee and thy Lord; for your two souls are bound up in the same bundle of life; therefore, it is possible for thee and Christ to walk together. Art thou and he of the same opinion? Are Christ's words thy doctrine? Hast thou been taught to give up all divinity except that which came from Jesus? Canst thou say of him, "He is my only Rabbi, my only Teacher in the law and the gospel; at his feet, with Mary, I could sit and receive his words, and believe all that he has uttered to be the very truth of God"? If so, believer, communion between thee and Christ is easy; for, when two agree in thought, and intention, and way, and affection, then they can walk together.

I have taken so much time for this first point that the other two must be very briefly hinted at.

II. The second point was to be, THE NECESSITY FOR THIS AGREEMENT.

First, Christ will not walk with us, unless we are agreed with him, *because, if he did so, it would be a slur upon his own honour;* nay, more than that, it would be a denial of his own nature. Should Christ come into concord with Belial? Should he make himself free and communicative with those who indulge the lusts of the flesh, and who disobey his commands? It would look ill if the king's son should walk arm in arm with traitors. We should not think it any good sign if we saw the highest in the land herding with the lowest. Christ keeps good company; and if we do not have our hearts purified by the Holy Spirit, he will not come to us at all. He will not abide even with his own children so long as they harbour sin. Invite the devil into the front parlour of your heart, and Christ will not come too. No, it would be a derogation of his own dignity, an insult to his own character to do so. Give your heart up to the indulgence of some ambitious desire, and you cannot give the Saviour the insult of inviting him to come to you. In our own houses, we do not invite two persons who are at enmity; and is it likely that Christ will come where sin is reigning, or pampered, or indulged? No, brethren; he knows there is sin in the best human heart; but, as long as it is kept down, and as long as he sees that our desires are to overturn it, he will come there; but when he sees sin petted and fed in the place which ought to his own palace, when he sees self-righteousness and self-security harboured there, he says, "I will not return until they have repented of their sin."

There is another reason why you cannot commune with Christ unless you are in agreement with him, and that is *because you yourselves are incapable of it.* Unless your soul be in agreement with Christ, unless in motive, and aim, and will, you are, as far as possible, like your Master, you cannot rise to the dignity of fellowship with him. Fellowship with Christ is a high privilege; no man can attain to it, as long as he indulges evil purposes, or low desires. The heart must be assimilated to the likeness of Christ, it must be cleansed and renewed by the Holy Spirit, or else it loses its wings, and is unable to mount to the high places of the earth, where Christ doth show to his people his love.

There is another reason why Christ will not commune with us

unless we are agreed with him, namely, *for our own good.* Christ cannot and will not hold sweet fellowship with his people unless they are in harmony with him. If Christians swerve from Christ's path, and backslide from his ways, and Christ were still to indulge them with love feasts, they would not realize their sin, and would still continue in it. Let a father indulge the erring child with all the usual display of his affection; let him put away the rod, let him never use a harsh word at all, but treat the sinning one with the same love as another who is dutiful and obedient, how is it to be expected that the child would ever forsake its faults? If Christ should give the same love, the same enjoyments, in sin and after sin, as he does in duty and after duty, his people would scarcely recognize their sins, and they would continue in them; but just as the Lord is pleased to make pain the tell-tale of disease, so that a headache becomes an indication of something wrong within the system, so does he make the absence of his own fellowship the tell-tale by which we may know that there is something within our soul that is hostile to him, something that must be driven away before the sacred Dove will come, with wings of comfort, to dwell in our hearts. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" No; that is impossible.

III. Now, thirdly, I want to urge all Christians to SEEK AFTER THIS AGREEMENT WITH CHRIST.

Beloved brethren and sisters, in order that you may agree with Christ, I have first to remind you that *the perpetual indwelling of the Holy Spirit must be with you.* Unless the same Spirit that dwells in Christ shall dwell in you, your agreement can never rise to such a height as to admit of any depth or nearness of union. Take care continually to seek the unction from on high, the indwelling of the Holy One of Israel. In the measure in which your heart has been endued by the divine influence and baptized by the holy fire of the Spirit, in that proportion will your soul be in agreement with Christ, and your union be true, and close, and lasting. Take care of that.

And then, next, under that divine influence, *look well to all your motives.* Seek not to have any aim to get honour to thyself, or honour to thy fellow-men. Take care that, in all thou doest, thou doest it with a single eye to thy Master's honour; for, unless thine eye is single, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If thou wilt win the sunlight of thy Master's face, thou must seek his glory, and his glory alone.

Then, if thou wouldst have union with Christ, take care, in the next place, *that thou doest all in dependence upon him;* for if, in the affairs of thy soul, thou settest up in business for thyself, Christ will be at enmity with thee. Seek not only to turn thine eye to him for direction, but also for support; and look to him in thy prayers, in thy preachings, in thy hearings, and in everything, for so shall Christ and thy soul be agreed, and thou shalt have fellowship with him.

And, lastly, *be continually panting after more holiness.* Never be content with what thou art; seek to grow, seek to be more and

more like Christ; and then, when that desire for holiness is strongest, thou wilt have the same desire that Christ has; for his desire is that thou shouldst be holy, even as he is holy; and his command is, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." And when your desires are Christ's desires, then shall it be possible for you to walk with Christ, but not till then.

I do long to have a church in complete agreement with the Lord Jesus Christ, for that would be a church against which the gates of hell could never prevail. If a church be merely founded by a man, the man will die, and the church shall perish. If a doctrine be only taught by a man, and you receive it on his authority, his authority shall pass away as all earthly things must; but, if it be of God, woe unto them that fight against it, for they can never prevail against him! Woe unto him that dashes himself against this stone, for he shall be broken in pieces; but if it be rolled upon him, it shall grind him to powder! Let us know that any church is a Church of God in her doctrines, and in her ordinances, and in her prayer and praise, and we may know that she shall be like the stone we read of in Daniel, "cut out of the mountain without hands;" none shall be able to break her, but she shall break all opposers in pieces, and she shall fill the earth.

Now there are some friends who are about to walk with Christ into this pool of baptism. Can two walk here except they be agreed? You may walk into this pool, but you cannot bring Christ with you except you are agreed with him. If you come without agreement with Christ, you will make a slip of it in your life, or else go back, and walk no more with him, and be offended with him. Remember, brethren and sisters, unless your two hearts are agreed, unless Christ and your heart be made one, you will fall out with one another before long; Christ will not long be at peace with you, nor will you be at peace with Christ. Your profession will be short-lived, after all, unless it be a true and real one, the expression of the inner heart. I pray that your profession to-night may be a sincere one, that you may testify to the world a true, saving, and entire agreement with your Lord and Master; and if any of you be not agreed with Christ, I beseech you, though you have come so far, come no farther. Go not into this pool till you are thoroughly agreed with Christ. I charge you, in the name of the living God, as you shall have to stand before his bar at last, play not the hypocrite. Be sincere; for, if you give yourselves not wholly to Christ, you are doing like those who come unworthily to the Lord's table, and who eat and drink condemnation to their own souls, for he that is plunged into the baptismal pool, as a hypocrite, is immersed unto his own damnation. But, O, ye humble followers of Jesus, you have testified to us your fellowship in the faith! Be not afraid now to confess it before men, and may God own all your names at last amongst the followers of the Lamb, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.*

JOHN IX.

Verses 1, 2. *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*

The procedure of these disciples is very much like that of many people in these days; they are much more ready to ask questions about sufferers than they are to sympathize with them. If the hearts of the disciples had been in a right condition when they saw this blind man, they would have said, "Lord, cannot this poor man's eyes be opened?" But, instead of talking like that, they were full of idle curiosity, which prompted them to raise metaphysical difficulties, and to ask foolish questions. So they wanted to know how it was that the man came to be born blind. Was it in consequence of some sin on the part of his parents, or through some sin of his own in a previous state of existence, (for some of them seem to have had even that foolish notion,) or was it because of some sin of his, which God foresaw that he would commit, and therefore laid this affliction upon him from the hour of his birth?

3. *Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*

That is to say, this blindness was not the result of special sin in any individual, but God intended that his works of mercy and of grace should be manifested through his affliction. It is a cruel thing when every form of malady or disease is traced to some fault in the person who has to suffer from it. This is infamous; I had almost said infernal; for Satan himself could hardly devise a more false and wicked thing than to say that, because a man is a special sufferer, therefore he must have been a special sinner. It is not so; for, often, some of God's truest children—some of those who live nearest to him—are those who keep the night watches through pain, or they are bedridden from year to year, or are deprived of some of their limbs, or in some other way are full of suffering. This is in order that, in their case also, the works of God should be manifest in them as they were in this poor blind man.

4. *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day:*

"I have no time to go into these questions with you, merely to satisfy your curiosity. 'While it is day,' I must go on with the work which I was sent into the world to do."

4—7. *The night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

There was no long discourse to be delivered while this poor man was waiting to see what would happen to him. Our Lord spoke just a few words to his disciples, and then went at once to the miracle he intended to perform.

"When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the

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* Regular readers of the Sermons will probably notice that this Exposition was given by MR. SPURGEON before he delivered the discourse published last week under the title, "A Pressed Man Yielding to Christ" (No. 2,667). It was too long to be issued then, so it is appended to this shorter Sermon for which no Exposition had been preserved.

spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." Our Saviour sometimes works without means, at other times by means, and occasionally he uses means which at first sight appear not to be the best to produce the designed result. To put clay on a blind man's eyes, does not seem a very likely operation for giving him sight. And, oh! dear friends, when God uses us as his instruments, and makes us to be like this clay upon the poor blind man's eyes, I am sure that there is much about us that might make us feel as if we should rather hinder than help; and when we do the best we can, what is there in us that is of any value? I think I once saw the pen with which Milton was said to have written part of *Paradise Lost*. Poor pen! It could not remember the great poet, could it? Yet, he had used it to noble purpose. As I looked at it, I did not think of ascribing a single stanza of that matchless poem to the pen with which Milton wrote. So, beloved, we are the pens that the Lord uses when he means to write his messages of grace upon the hearts of saints and sinners; but we are such poor pens, such feeble instruments to be held in his hand, that we wonder he can ever make use of us.

This blind man did exactly as he was bidden to do. What a blessing it was for him that he received the clay on his eyes, and simply went and washed it off again as the Saviour bade him! That was all he had to do, and then he came back seeing clearly. Oh, if sinners were only attentive to gospel directions, and then were obedient to them, without adding to them or taking from them, how many more blind eyes would be very speedily opened, and how greatly would Christ be glorified!

8, 9. *The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.*

With that downright simplicity and shrewdness which marked his whole character, the man said, "I am he." He did not go beating about the bush at all, but he straightway acknowledged that he was the man of whom they were speaking.

10, 11. *Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.*

I admire the brevity of his statement, the boldness of it, and the simple *naïveté* of it. The way in which he told the story did not embellish it in the least degree; in fact, it could not have been embellished without spoiling it. And when you, dear friends, are giving an account of your own conversion, describing the way in which salvation became yours, tell it as simply and plainly as ever you can. It will never be so well adorned as when it appears in its own naked simplicity and beauty. I commend this man's example to all of you who have to give your testimony before you are admitted as members of the church; when speaking of your conversion, put the narrative in as plain and simple a form as this man adopted.

12—14. *Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not. They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.*

Therefore, this act of Christ would be something horrible in the eyes of the Pharisees. They would make out that Christ, when he made the clay, had turned brickmaker on the Sabbath day, thus violating the traditions of the fathers, just as, on another occasion, they said that he allowed his disciples to go threshing on the Sabbath, when they gathered ears of corn in the field, rubbed them between their hands, and ate the grain because they were hungry. The Rabbis regarded that as an act of threshing, and a very

serious violation of the law; and now that Jesus had himself made clay, and opened a man's eyes with it, they held up their hands in holy horror,—nay, in impious horror,—that Christ should do such a thing on the Sabbath.

15. *Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.*

He makes his story shorter as he goes on telling it. These people were unworthy of the words he spoke to them, and therefore he gave them as few as possible.

16, 17. *Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.*

That was as much as he then knew. By thoughtful consideration, he had come as far as to know that Jesus must be a prophet.

18—21. *But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.*

They also were shrewd. They did not wish to get themselves into trouble, and therefore they said as little as they could, and referred the Pharisees to their son, who was quite able to answer them.

22—24. *These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.*

They thought that they could smooth the man over, so that he would say no more. "We know—we who know everything, we who are the rulers and teachers of the people,—we know that this man is a sinner." That might have closed the mouths of many men; but, on that occasion, they had before them a person who could not easily be made to believe all they chose to say,—a sharp, shrewd man, who had keener eyes in his head, even when he was blind, than they had while they could see.

25. *He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*

"About that point, I am perfectly certain, whatever question there may be concerning anything else."

26—28. *Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him,—*

As they could not answer him, they reviled him. It is the old plan which is still followed by certain lawyers, "No case; therefore abuse the plaintiff." "They reviled him,"—

28, 29. *And said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this—*

They did not say "fellow," because they meant something worse than that, something which they could not express: "As for this ——"

29, 30. *We know not from whence he is. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.*

They were the gentlemen who said, "We know," and they wanted, a little while before, to silence him by parading their superior knowledge; so now he turns upon them, and says, "Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes."

31. *Now we know that God heareth not sinners:*

He meant men who are living in known sin, impostors and deceivers. Of course, God would not hear sinners of that stamp.

31—33. *But if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.*

This was bravely spoken. The man did not, at that time, know the Godhead of the Saviour, but he felt that he must have come from God, that he was one of God's servants, or messengers, or prophets, therefore he avowed what he knew. Dear friends, always act up to the light you have enjoyed. If you have starlight, thank God for it, and own it before men, for then he will give you moonlight; and if you have moonlight, walk by it, thank God for it, and own it, and he will give you sunlight; and when you have sunlight, walk in it, and so, one of these days, you will come to that light which is as the light of seven days, the light of God himself.

34. *They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*

Their dignity was touched; their superlative wisdom lifted them so much above this poor man that they said, with the utmost disdain, "Dost thou teach us?"

34, 35. *And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out;*

Oh! if there are any of you who are suffering persecution for Christ's sake, who have been cast out of any company because of what he has done for you, I do not think you need any sweeter comfort than this one line: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out;"

35—37. *And when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.*

I scarcely remember that, up to this time, the Lord Jesus had given such a manifestation of himself to anyone except to the Samaritan woman at the well. When she mentioned the Messiah, he said to her, "I that speak unto thee am he;" and here he reveals himself to this man as the Son of God, which was somewhat more than that woman probably meant by the term "Messias."

38. *And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

Which proves that the man was not a Unitarian. "He worshipped him" who had opened his eyes, and we also will worship him for ever and ever, blessed be his holy name!

39—41. *And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.*

It would have been better for them if they had known their blindness, and applied to him who could give them sight, and forgive their sin.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COMFORT FROM CHRIST'S OMNISCIENCE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 8TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 15th, 1882.

"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."—John xxi. 17.

PETER was somewhat hardly pressed. He felt that he was pushed into a corner, and compelled to look into his own heart, and divulge its innermost secret. To be asked once, in the presence of his brethren, whether he loved his Lord more than they did, had a tendency to humiliate him, for he had boastfully declared that, though all men should be offended because of Christ, he would not. But to be asked, next, whether he really loved Christ at all, sank him to the ground with holy shame; and when his Master asked him, the third time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter was grieved,—not angry;—that could not be his condition under such circumstances, nor was he rebellious; but, at last, his heart was effectually touched by his Master's skilful hand, and he was grieved, just as true love is always grieved when it is questioned, but most of all grieved when it is questioned again, and again, and again. Now, the enormity of his guilt in denying his Lord has come home to him, and the grief which he had caused his gracious Master is now reflected in his own deep and contrite sorrow: "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?"

Our Saviour's thus pressing him closely was no doubt necessary as a salutary discipline to Peter. It was not unkindness, but the highest form of honest tenderness which led our Lord to act in this way. I suppose that, if such a thing had occurred in any one of our churches as for some leading member to deny that he knew Christ, and to go the length of denying it with oaths and curses, and to commit that great sin three times, in the presence of many witnesses, so that the fact could not possibly be doubted, it would have been absolutely necessary, according to the teaching of the New Testament, to exercise discipline upon such a man, and I think that he must have been excluded from church-fellowship. The apostle Paul, writing concerning one who had been guilty of gross sin, says

that, with such a man, we can have no fellowship,—no, not so much as to eat with him; and he would have said the same about Peter. He had denied Christ with oaths and curses; it was a most heinous sin, and surely the purity of the Church would be put in jeopardy —the very existence of the Church as a testimony for Christ would be hazarded—by the retaining of such a man in its communion. According to such a rule as that, I suppose we must always judge. But the Lord Jesus Christ possessed attributes which we have not; he was omniscient, and therefore he could read Peter's heart. It was not necessary for him to do what it might be lawful and even needful for us to do. He knew that Peter's heart was right notwithstanding all the evil of which he had been guilty. So, instead of refusing to have fellowship with him, the Saviour first eats with him,—Christ literally bids him come to breakfast; and then he exercises what I may call a sort of church discipline upon him, though I mean that expression in no hard or unkind sense. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Then that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear;" and our Lord acted in that manner on this occasion. The six other brethren, who might fitly be regarded as representing the entire church, were present; and the Saviour began gently, but firmly, to probe Peter's heart, and to probe it again, and yet again, until he perceived that he had touched him in the tenderest possible place, and had drawn from him this last and most solemn declaration of the sincerity of his love: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Thrice had he denied his Lord; it was meet, therefore, that he should thrice confess his love, and so his Master constrained him to do by his thrice-repeated question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

Let us, dear friends, as we think over this sad incident of Peter's sin, and of our Lord's gracious way of restoring him to his former office by a gentle act of discipline, put ourselves through a little heart-searching. It may be that, thanks to the restraining grace of God, we have not sinned as Peter did; but we have sinned in some other way. We have all of us sinned quite enough to make us say, "Lord, do we love thee?" Instead of waiting for him to put the question to us, we will ask it of ourselves,—Do we really and truly love the Lord? Let us also believe that our Lord, as he stands at this moment among us, and walks from pew to pew, bows his head over each one of us, and says, "Lovest thou me?"

As he does so, let us not evade the question, or play any tricks with it. Let not any one of us say, "I hope I do," or, "I am afraid I do not." We either do or we do not; and the only answer that will be satisfactory will be "Yes," or "No." If we say, "No," it will be so far satisfactory that we are speaking the truth; and, possibly, we may be helped to start back from so terrible a truth as that we do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, and that will be good for us, especially if it shall lead us to yield to him. A man should always know the consequences of what he is doing, that he may do it with his eyes open; and, then, peradventure, he will see the folly and the sin of it, and take to a better course. But if, dear friend, you can answer, "Yes," to Christ's question, then do say

it. Slowly, thoughtfully, as in the presence of the Eternal God, say, "Lord, I ask thee to bear witness on my account, for thy word is faithful and true. 'Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'" If you can say that, it will be a happy thing for yourself, and it will be a blessed thing for those who are round about you; for, now, being assured of your own love to Christ, you will endeavour to win others to share that love, that many of you together may be able to say to Christ,—

"Yes, we love thee, and adore;
Oh, for grace to love thee more!"

Now, coming to the text, I am going to try to do two things;—first, to *examine Peter's reply;* and then, secondly, to *invite you to examine yourselves to see whether you can each give the same reply.*

I. First, let us EXAMINE PETER'S REPLY: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

I begin with the observation that it is quite clear, from his reply, that *Peter was no Unitarian.* He had no doubts about the Divinity of Christ, for he said to him, "Lord, thou knowest all things." Now, there is no being conceivable as knowing all things except God; and if it be true that Jesus Christ knows all things, then he possesses that omniscience which is one of the essential attributes of Deity. I find that, nowadays, there is a sad increase of that pestilent heresy which is practically a return to the old Arianism which sought to rob Christ of his true glory, and reduce him to the level of a mere man. We, at any rate, are not tainted with that fatal error; God grant that we never may be! No; he who, as man, is our brother, is also God, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom we worship and adore; and we think and speak of him as possessing every attribute that is essential to the Deity, and, therefore, as possessing this one,—that he knows all things. He searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men, for he is, assuredly, "very God of very God;" or, as Paul says, in his Epistle to the Romans, he "is over all, God blessed for ever."

My next remark upon our text is, that Peter's mention of omniscience in connection with Christ, and in connection with our declaration of love to him, may be regarded as *a fact very full of awe,* because the Christ with whom we have to deal knows everything of which we are thinking, he reads all that is in the very core and centre of our soul; we are in the presence of One whose infinite knowledge takes in, at one glance, the whole of our lives, past, present, and future.

My dear friends, if we recollect that fact, it becomes a very solemn thing for us to make an appeal to him to bear witness that we do really love him. Peter said to Christ, "Lord, thou knowest all things," which in his case meant, "Lord thou knowest that, when the damsel said to me, 'Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee,' I denied it, and said, 'I know not what thou sayest;' and when another maiden said, 'This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth,' I denied with an oath, and said, 'I do not know the man;' and then, as if to settle

the matter once for all, and make my accusers believe that I could not be one of Christ's followers, I took to profane swearing, and with oaths and curses, like any son of Belial or lewd fellow of the streets, I did blaspheme and swear." Yes, the Master had read the inner thoughts of Peter, as well as heard his words. Jesus knew all about how mean and cowardly he was to be afraid of a couple of silly maids, and of those who stood with the throng in the high priest's palace; yet Peter says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." As we think of poor Peter, and his answer to Christ's question, let us recollect that Jesus also knows everything that we have done since we were converted as well as before,—all those times in which our thoughts have been impure and unclean, or our desires have wandered beyond the bounds of that which is right and proper, or our temper has been hasty and hot, or our spirit has been angry and proud. He sees the whole of our life in a single instant; God's mind does not need a certain space of time to think of one wrong thing which we have done, and then, afterwards, to think of another; but it is all present before his eye at the same moment. As when a man rises in a balloon, above London, and sees it all at once spread before him, so God, from his throne on high, sees our whole life at one glance. Just think of his pure and holy eyes seeing every portion of all your lives,—your life at the table, your life in the parlour, your life in the kitchen, your life in the workroom, your life in the bedchamber, your life everywhere,—and, as you think of all that being under his immediate gaze, I think it must become a very solemn thing for you to say to him, "Lord, thou knowest all this; and yet I dare call thee to witness that I do love thee notwithstanding all that thou hast seen." Brothers and sisters, it is not by any means a trifling matter if our Lord only knows the sin of last week. Will you just think for a minute what it has been? Perhaps some of you may have grievously wronged the Saviour during the week. If so, and remembering that he knows it all, can you yet creep up to him, and say, "Lord, though I am fully conscious that thou knowest all that has happened, yet, for all that, I do say, thou also knowest that I love thee." That is a fact full of awe.

It is, in the next place, *a fact which suggests to us that we should be very sincere;* for, if the Lord knows all things, then anything like an attempt to profess a love which we do not possess is utterly foolish, for God will search it through and through, and discover its falseness. Then, in addition to being very foolish, it must be very wicked and insulting to the Lord. To tell another human being, whom you do not love, that you love him, would be a most cruel thing to do, and a most impudent and impertinent thing also; but voluntarily to express to God an affection which you do not feel, is a very near approach to blasphemy. If it be not blasphemy in words, it certainly is in thought and intent. God knows, friend, whether, when you joined the church, you were indeed a follower of Christ. That night, when you were baptized, he saw all that was done; and he knew exactly whether it was to you only an outward form, or whether you were really, in a spiritual sense, dead

and buried with Christ. And when this service is over, it will be vain and futile for you to come to the communion table, and eat the bread, and drink of the cup, unless in your very soul you are trusting Christ, and believing in him unto salvation. If you are determined to deceive someone, deceive your equal, play tricks with your fellow-creatures; but never think to deceive the Most High, who sees through you as if you were made of crystal, and at this moment is watching each beat of your heart, and reading not only what is on your tongue, but what is in your mind, and will come forth from your lips by-and-by. Oh, let us never, in our testimony, talk beyond our own line, or boast of virtues which we never possessed; and in our prayers, let us never pray as if we had an experience which we have never felt; but let us say to Jesus, "Lord, thou knowest all things;" and let us be intensely sincere before him; and it shall be a blessed thing if, being so, we then dare to say, "yet thou knowest that I love thee."

Further, dear friends, this is a fact which not only fills us with awe and suggests to us sincerity, but it is *a fact which inspires us with hope.* At times, the grace that is really in us is scarcely visible to ourselves. I have often rejoiced that God's omniscience has enabled him to spy out grace in me which I could not see, and I feel sure that there must be some of you who sometimes are led to question whether there is any grace in you or not. You ask, "Where is that grain of mustard seed?" Fie on you! Fie on you! You ought to have watered it till it grew into a tree. But remember that, even when you cannot see the grace that is in you, God can. When you are brought into such a state of diffidence and despondency that you are half afraid there is not any real love to Christ in your soul at all, yet, if it be there, he can see it, for he put it there, and he values it very highly, and has a quick eye to spy it out.

"Lord, thou knowest all things; therefore, I do bless thee that thou knowest every place where I have been, and thou knowest my secret love passages with thee." That is a blessed thought. I have no doubt that, when Peter said to Christ, "Thou knowest all things," he not only recollected his sin, but he recollected his going out, and weeping bitterly; and he also recollected that look that Jesus gave him,—such a look as you and I could not give to anyone. I do not know what Peter said to the Lord while he was weeping bitterly, but there must have been many a sigh, and many a groan, and many a tear, in that time of anguish. Peter no doubt got away into a corner, all alone, and he was ready to cover himself with sackcloth and ashes, as he there groaned, and wrestled, and cried. He did not know what to do with himself; and while he was thus praying, perhaps his Lord let in the light of the gospel, and made him recollect some such promise as this, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy;" and Peter had some comfortable gleams of hope even amid the darkness, and, after a while, he did even dare to speak to his Lord, and tell him how he loved him. And now Peter says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest

that I love thee, for between thee and me there have been some love passages which nobody knows but thyself and myself. My eyes all full of tears have met thy eyes all full of love; and my heart all breaking has touched thy heart which was pierced upon the tree. Thy wounded hand has been laid to my sore, and thy weeping eyes have looked my tears away. Thou knowest, Lord; thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." So, dear friends, you see that there is something exceedingly sweet about that omniscience which has read the secret motions of our spirit towards the Lord. Even when they have been so feeble that we could scarcely see them ourselves, God has seen them.

And do you not think, dear friends, that there is something very blessed in Peter's plan of bringing in Christ's omniscience to answer his Lord's question about his love, inasmuch as *it meets our inability to speak?* Some of us can speak fast enough, but others have the holy gift of silence, which is a great blessing. They cannot say much, but they can look up to their Saviour, and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee." I have heard of a young Christian woman, who was asked to tell before the church the story of her experience; but she could not utter a word, till, just as she was going out of the room, she turned round, and said, "I cannot speak for Jesus Christ, but I could die for him." Then the one, who was in charge of the meeting, said to her, "Come back, dear sister, you have said quite enough for us to know that you love the Lord." No doubt there are many who find it easier to live for Christ than to speak for him; they have not that gift. Let me remind you who must always be the silent members of the church, that you may be blessed in your silence by reflecting upon this fact, that God knows all about what you cannot explain to your fellow-Christians. His omniscience sets aside the necessity of your being able to express your love fluently, and you also can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee."

And is not this fact *a sweet encouragement to any of you who are persecuted for Christ's sake?* Our enemies do not burn us now, or stretch us on racks, but they have many methods of showing their malice still. They know how to torture us, and some of them are very ingenious in the art of tormenting. I have known some say,—ungodly parents will say it to their daughters,—sometimes, wicked men will say it to their gracious wives,—"You know very well that all your idea about being religious is that you want to be singular. You go to your place of worship because you like to be different from everybody else; that is the only reason you have." Possibly, you do not know what to say to them; but you can always say this to your Saviour, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'

Then, again, if there is some little fault to be found with you in the family, down they come upon you, crying, "Ah! that is your Christianity, is it? You are one of those who have professed to be religious, and joined the church!" Mark you, friends, they will do a hundred times worse things themselves, and think nothing of it; but if they can catch you tripping in the slightest degree, they

magnify your little slip into a grievous fall. Now, it would be quite fair for them to do so if you set up to be perfect; but as you never did that, it is an unfair thing to charge you with insincerity because of imperfection. Do not let them have the opportunity of saying even that, if you can help it; yet, sometimes, when you have given them no occasion for finding fault with you, they will make one, and invent an accusation for which there is no foundation. Well, if they do so, never mind; let them say what they will, but lift up your eyes to heaven, and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." A man of God,—as upright a Christian man as I know,—came to me, not long ago, in great trouble because somebody had said that he had been drunk. He was dreadfully cut up about it, for he had been a teetotaller for many years, and nothing of the kind had occurred. "Well," I said, "you are only tarred with the same brush as others of us;" and then I added, "As for me, I have had all manner of false and cruel things said about me! I recollect that an influential daily paper said of me, at the time of the Surrey Gardens accident, 'We would place, in the hand of every right-thinking man, a whip to scourge from society such a ranting charlatan.' Yet I am here still, notwithstanding all that was said. Moreover, when most abused, I used to go to bed at the same hour as I should have done if they had not slandered me; and I believe that I ate my dinner with as hearty an appetite as if everybody had been praising me." One gets by degrees into such a condition that it does not matter what people say. And, after all, does it ever really matter what they say? Let them throw mud at you till you are covered with it from head to foot; the kind of mud they fling has a tendency to come off when it is dry, and to make the garment that it once sullied look even brighter than it was before. Do not fret yourselves about these slanderers and persecutors, but just get alone, and say to the Lord, "'Thou knowest all things.' They do not; and it is a good thing for us that they do not. If they did, then they might find plenty of fault with us, and find some real faults in us; but they do not know everything, and they generally hit on the very thing of which we are quite innocent; but, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee.'"

This seems to me to be a blessed text for you to take home, and to carry with you wherever you go in the midst of a ribald world, for *it will often remind you of a precious truth:* "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Of course he does, if you do really love him, for it is his own love in you returning whence it came, and he knows that it is there. If you do love him, it was he who made you love him. This plant of paradise never grows of its own accord in the dunghill of our nature; neither does it grow anywhere unless it is planted by the hand of God. He who gave you that love watches over it to bring it to perfection. Being a plant of his own right-hand planting, he will water it every moment; and lest any hurt it, he will keep it night and day. Having loved the Lord here on earth, you shall love him by-and-by in heaven, where, with all the bloodwashed company, you shall find

it the very heaven of your heaven to live for ever, adoring him whose eternal love, and sovereign grace, and almighty power have at last made you perfect, and brought you home, to love him even as he loves you, according to your capacity.

II. There I must leave the text, so far as it specially concerns Peter, and come now to speak briefly upon the second part of the subject, which is, TO INVITE YOU TO EXAMINE YOURSELVES TO SEE WHETHER YOU CAN EACH GIVE THE SAME REPLY: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

First, *some say the same as Peter did, though they ought not to do so.* They say that they love Christ. "Yes, oh, yes; we love him!" Let us talk to one of these glib speakers for a few moments. When did you begin to love the Lord? "Oh! I—I—I always did love him." When were you converted, and renewed in heart? "Oh! I do not know that I ever was." Stop, then, friend, before you say again that you love the Lord. Do you truly trust the Saviour? Are you resting the whole weight of your soul upon him? If you say, "No," then you do not love him, for the only love which Christ will accept is born of faith. Love is the flower which grows out of the root of faith.

Perhaps you think that you are very good, and that you will probably get to heaven by your goodness. If that is your notion, then I am sure you do not really love Christ. You admire your beautiful self; you have been so good, and so excellent, that you do not want to be saved by the sinners' Saviour. You want a special, particular Saviour for you,—a saint-Saviour, not a sinner's Saviour. Then I know you do not love the Christ of the Bible,—the Christ of Calvary. You may love a sort of antichrist of your own inventing, but you do not love the Christ of God. Let me ask you another question. You say that you love Christ; well, then, for what do you thank Christ? "Well, I believe that there are some imperfections in me, and that Christ makes up for them." Do you? Then, in your esteem, he is only a makeweight, just to compensate for your deficiencies. His seamless robe of righteousness is to be torn to patch up your old rags! How many of you want to make Christ a kind of extra horse to drag the load up the hill! That is all you think of him; but do you imagine that Christ and your poor team are to be joined together like that? Is it to be partly self-salvation, and partly salvation by Christ? If that is your idea, you so insult the Saviour—it may be unwittingly,—that I am sure you cannot really love him.

I have heard of a very excellent man,—one of the holiest and best of men,—who, when he lay dying, said, "Lord, when I estimate my works, I have to recollect that thy estimate is so very different from mine that I think it best to leave this business altogether, and trust my Saviour only." I have heard of another who said, when he was dying, that he began to sort out his works, and some he thought were good, and some were bad; but after he had sorted them a little, he felt that the good ones were so very like the bad ones when he came really to look closely into them, that he pitched the whole lot overboard, and just trusted himself to Christ." That

was a very wise and sensible thing to do, and I am sure that no man among you loves Christ unless he is trusting to him only, and to him wholly.

What is your view of Christ, dear friend? Is he your Master as well as your Saviour? This is a question which I want to put very pointedly, for I heard a person ask, the other day, "Is baptism essential to salvation?" Listen. This man means to do only just that which is essential for his own salvation; that is all. To get into heaven, is all that he cares about, so he asks concerning one thing or another, "Is it essential to salvation?" A soldier in her Majesty's army says, when an order is given to him, "Is this essential? Shall I be shot if I do not obey it?" Drum him out of the regiment, for what is the good of him? I look upon Christ as my Lord and Master; and if he bids me do something, though there may be in it nothing whatever to my profit, I am bound to do it because he is my Master and Lord. "Is it essential to salvation?" is a sneak's question; I dare not use a milder term. I am often ashamed to answer those who make such an enquiry. The message to you is, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Did you come into the world merely that you might get saved? Is that all? Oh, poor, mean wretch! The Lord save you from being so selfish! How can you even get to heaven when your sole ambition is, somehow or other, to save your own skin? To get inside the pearly gates, and enjoy yourself,—that is your notion of heaven; but that is the very thing from which you have to be saved. I hope you will come to have quite another idea. I live, not to save myself, but to glorify him who has saved me. I work, not because I hope to escape from hell by what I do, or to get to heaven by what I do, but because Christ has saved me; and now, out of gratitude to him, if there is anything he wishes me to do, I do it without a question, saying to him,—

"Hast thou a lamb in all thy flock
I would disdain to feed?
Hast thou a foe, before whose face
I fear thy cause to plead?"

Get rid of selfishness, or else you cannot truthfully say that you love Christ; you are only loving yourself, and baptizing selfishness with the name of Christianity.

But, next, I think that *there are some persons who ought to say what Peter did, and yet they are afraid to do so.* Some of the most beautiful, tender, loving, genuine, true-hearted people in the world are, nevertheless, so timid, and so jealous of themselves, and they have such brokenness of spirit, that they dare not say that they love Christ, though I am sure that, if any people in the world do love him, it is just these poor people. There are many who are so hard and harsh towards these dear tender, broken-hearted ones, that I like to cheer them all I can. I wish that they would grow stronger; I wish that they would become bolder; I wish they were braver; but, then, I know that, among these who dare not say publicly that they love Christ, are many who love him vastly better than some who can talk very glibly about it. I have told you

before of the two friends who were shut up in prison, and one said to the other, "Oh, I do dread to-morrow morning! I am afraid that, when I come to feel the fire, I shall recant. I know that I never was good at bearing pain, and I have heard that the pain of being burnt to death is very dreadful." So the other turned round upon him, and said, "I am ashamed of you talking like that; you know, very well, it is for Christ's cause that we are going to die. I am sure that I shall not have any such fear; I could bear a thousand deaths for Christ. I feel such courage in my spirit that I do not dread the pain, and I am ashamed that you do." They both came to be chained to the stake, and the boastful man recanted, and saved his skin; but the poor timid man stood bravely in the midst of the fire, and burned to death, and kept only saying, "Lord, help me! Lord, help me!" I believe that it often happens that those who are so trembling in themselves, are, nevertheless, sound to the core, while many of your high-flying gentlemen, who get perfect in about three minutes, and then begin to preach to those of us who have been, perhaps, thirty years in Christ, and tell us that we ought to be as perfect as they are,—which we were before they were born,—will be blown away like thistledown by the first wind that comes, and that the solid, weighty lumps of gold—these humble broken-hearted saints,—will endure even to the end. Still, dear brother, where are you? Mr. Despondency, I mean. I want you to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Where are you, Mrs. Much-afraid? I think I have read about you in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Mrs. Much-afraid, and Mr. Despondency, and Mr. Feeble-mind, and Mr. Ready-to-halt, who had the crutches, and went limping all his life; yet, once upon a time, when Mr. Great-heart cut off Giant Despair's head, and brought it to the pilgrims, they said that they would all dance, and Ready-to-halt danced on his crutches, and said that he hoped, by-and-by, to be where he should not be encumbered with them. Come along, all you poor tried souls, let this be a time of rejoicing with you. Say in your spirit, if not in words, "Yes, Lord, we cannot hold back any longer, we must say it; 'Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee.'" And when you have once said it, keep on saying it, my dear brother or sister; and the Lord keep you up to that blessed mark till, when the trumpet sounds in the morning, and you wake up in the endless day, you shall say, "Yes, Lord, I did love thee, and I love thee now, and I will love thee for ever." God grant that we may all say that, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Before we go, let us sing this one verse,—

> "I will love thee in life, I will love thee in death,
> And praise thee as long as thou lendest me breath;
> And say, when the death-dew lies cold on my brow,
> If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—711, 788, 639, 804.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH XXVI. 1—14.

Verse 1. *In that day—*

Or, rather, as we may read it now, "In this day"—

1—3. *Shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

Here is the song which we are to sing in this gospel day. The theme of it is God, and the city which he has builded, and which he has given to us to be our heritage for ever. "We have a strong city;" yes, beloved, a very strong one, for, although the devil has exercised all his ingenuity for these thousands of years, he has not been able to destroy it. He has thrown in the bombshell of persecution; he has tried to undermine it with his subtlety and cunning of false doctrine; but he has not been able to do anything effectually against the strong city yet. "We have a strong city;" and she is just as strong now, after all the desperate attacks that have been made upon her walls, as ever she was. Against her, the gates of hell cannot prevail. The Church of Christ is never in danger. "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks."

After noticing the security of the city, the prophet bids us "open the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." It is the gospel minister's business to seek to open the gates; it is the Christian's business, in some sense, to open the gates; yea, we should all of us be endeavouring, if possible, to "open the gates, that the righteous nation"—that is, the righteous people "may enter" into the Church. But, after all, the Lord Jesus Christ is the great Opener of the gates; he opens the gates to let his people in. And, mark you, they do not all come in at one gate. The command is, "Open ye the *gates*." Some come in by means of one doctrine, and some by means of another. We are not all converted by the same agency. Some come in at the Sunday-school gate; others come in at the gate which is kept by pious parents; many come in at the gate of the preached Word; but all the gates should be open: "Open ye the *gates*, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."

The prophet next describes the peaceableness of this city. The gates are open, but no enemy ever enters in: for he says to the Lord, "Thou wilt keep him in peace,—peace," as the original has it, in double peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." There is nothing like staying the mind on God. If you stay the mind on anything else, you cannot have perfect peace, for that something else may fail you. If you trust in horses and in chariots, horses may tire, and the wheels of the chariots may break; but he who trusteth in the Lord shall dwell "in perfect peace." Let the earth be all in arms abroad, the believer dwells "in perfect peace," "because he trusteth in thee."

4, 5. *Trust ye in the* LORD *for ever: for in the* LORD *JEHOVAH is everlasting strength: for he bringeth down them that dwell on high;*

Some of you dwell so much "on high" that you do not believe the doctrine of original depravity; you are very good by nature, according to your own ideas. Well, remember this declaration of the prophet: "He bringeth down them that dwell on high." Others of you boast of your free-will capacity, and you think you have power to do anything without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Ah! but "He bringeth down them that dwell on high." Others of you do not know what a doubt or a fear is, but you wrap yourselves up complacently in your self-sufficiency, and say, "We are secure." Ah! but "He bringeth down them that dwell on high."

5. *The lofty city, he layeth it low;*

No one can lay God's city low, but God can lay the lofty city low.

5—7. *He layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy. The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.*

God "weighs the path of the just" in scales. We read elsewhere that God weighs the spirits, and weighs our actions; here we are told that he "weighs the path of the just." Those words, which were used by the prophet when he went to Hezekiah and said, "What have they seen in thine house?" would serve for a very striking text. But it is still more important to consider what God has seen in our house and in our hearts, for God weighs our actions; he weighs our private thoughts and our public deeds; he "weighs the path of the just."

But, according to the prophet, "the way of the just is uprightness," even after it is weighed. Notwithstanding all the sin that is mixed with it, in the main it is "*u*prightness" ascending towards God.

8, 9. *Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

Alas! it is often the case that, when God's "judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" for a little while, and then forget it. All too often, they are like the child who merely learns his lesson by rote, and repeats it under the fear of the rod, and then forgets all about it on the morrow. They "learn righteousness," but, soon, the effect of the warning is all gone, and then God sends fresh judgments upon the earth to teach the inhabitants further lessons.

10—12. *Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD. LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them. LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.*

Troubled saint, what a precious passage this is for thee! Poor, tempest-tossed soul, what a glorious utterance! "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us." There shall come an ordinance from God, that his people shall have peace: "Thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us;" so they must be good works, but those works which God did not work in us are bad ones.

13, 14. *O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise:*

Many of us can look back to the time when we made idols of business and of worldly things; but now these lords are dead, and they shall not live again; they are buried out of our sight, and they shall not rise from their graves.

14. *Therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.*

And a blessed thing it is when the memory of our sins does perish, and we have no desire to be enslaved by them again.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PRIDE CATECHIZED

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 15TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, October 19th, 1882.

"Should it be according to thy mind; he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest."—Job xxxiv. 33.

DEAR friends, it is never wise to dispute with God. Let a man strive with his fellow, but not with his Maker. If we must discuss any point, let it be with imperfect beings like ourselves, but not with the infallible and infinitely wise God; for, in most of our discussions, these questions will come back to us, "Should it be according to thy mind? Art thou master? Is everyone to be subordinate to thee?"

I am going to speak, this evening, to those who have a quarrel with God concerning the way of salvation. They are very unwise not to take salvation just as God brings it to them; but they do not. They have some difficulty or other, so they raise a dispute, and they have been, perhaps for years, cavilling at the Saviour whose infinite goodness has provided a way of salvation exactly adapted to their needs. I am going to use Elihu's words, and apply them to their case.

I. To begin at the beginning, here is, first, A QUESTION: "Should it be according to thy mind?" You say that you are willing to find mercy, and that you are very teachable; but you object to the plan of salvation as it is revealed in the Scriptures.

First, then, *what is it to which you object?* Do you object to the very basis of the plan, namely, that God will forgive sin through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his Son? I know that some do object to this; they cannot bear to hear about atonement by blood, or justification by imputed righteousness. Others, who will not say that they object to atonement, spirit away the very meaning of it. They cannot endure that glorious doctrine of substitution which is such a joy to us. Christ standing in the sinner's stead, and the sinner then standing in the place of Christ,—Christ taking

the sinner's sin, and the sinner wearing Christ's righteousness,—all this they absolutely reject. "No doubt Christ did something for sinners," they say; but they cannot define what he did; and, as for the sin of any man being actually put away by Christ being punished in the room and place and stead of the ungodly sinner, they will not believe it.

Yet, that is God's plan of salvation, and some of us know, in our inmost hearts, that we never had peace until we accepted that plan of salvation; and that now, if it should be taken away from us, we should lose all the joy of existence, and should go back to the despair which, at one time, was so heavy upon us that we could sympathize with Job when he said, "My soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life." We could better afford that the sun should be quenched, that the moon should be darkened, that all springs should be dried, that the very air itself should disappear,—we could better afford to die, and rot in our graves, than that we should lose our Saviour, and his atoning blood, and justifying righteousness. Whatever you, Mr. Objector, may say about it, we say to you, "Should it be according to thy mind?" Would you have Christ to die, and yet not really secure salvation by his death? Could you invent a better plan, or even one half as good,—

"So just to God, so safe for man,"—

so consolatory to a wounded conscience, so constraining to gratitude when that conscience has been pacified? Would you, could you, propose anything one thousandth part as good as God's plan of salvation? Even if you could, "should it be according to thy mind?" Who are you, a guilty sinner, to despise the Saviour's blood? If you had your deserts, you would years ago have been in the lowest pit of hell; will you set aside the cross of Christ, and seek to put something else in the place of the crucified Redeemer?

But, possibly, you do not object to the doctrine of substitution, but your objection is to the way of salvation by faith. "I don't like that doctrine of justification by faith," says one, "for I am sure that, when it is preached, people will begin to think that there is no virtue in good works, and that they may live as they like." I have often heard such a remark as yours, my friend, but experience is dead against you. Whenever justification by faith has been uppermost in the preaching, the morals of the people have been purest, and their spirituality has been brightest. But whenever the preachers have extolled the works and ceremonies of the law, or the Arminianism which brings in something of trust in works, or human power, it is most certain that there has been a declension in point of morals, while religion itself has seemed almost ready to expire. You may go to those who preach up salvation by works to hear them talk, but you had better not go to see how they live, whereas those who preach justification by faith can boldly point to the multitudes who have accepted this truth, and whose godly lives prove the sanctifying power of the doctrine.

But if you object to this doctrine, how would you like to have it altered? "Oh, well! I would like to have some good feelings put in

with faith." And how, then, would any man be saved? Can he command his own feelings? Those feelings come naturally enough after faith; but, if they be demanded without faith, how will they ever be presented to God? Besides, feelings would claim some credit if they were thus joined with faith. A man would be able to boast that he had felt his way to heaven, and he would have the same self-congratulatory spirit which we see in those who trust in works and ceremonies; and thus Christ would be robbed of his glory as the sinner's Saviour. Man would put his dirty hand upon the crown, and place it upon his own head; but that must never be the case. You shall be saved if you trust the Saviour; but if you do not like that way of salvation, you never can be saved. Why should the plan of salvation be changed for you? Is God to be tied down to act only as you please? Is he to alter his gospel to suit the fancies of rebellious men? That must not be. There is no mistake about this matter: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him;" and our Lord himself said, "He that believeth not shall be damned." That is the only message for him if he continues in his unbelief; and it shall not be altered to suit the mind of any man that lives.

"Oh, but!" say some, "we object to the requirements of the gospel, especially to that verse where Christ says, 'Ye must be born again.' Where is the need of that? We were christened when we were children; we were confirmed as we grew older; we have taken the sacrament; but we do not agree with that hard saying, 'Ye must be born again.'" They will not walk with Christ if he insists upon that condition.

Moreover, he requires the giving up of all known sin, the hating of all sin, and the objector says, "But may I not retain my one darling sin? May I not keep my pet evil? I will give up all else, but that one I must have." And when men are told that, wherever Christ comes, he makes a radical change, he casts out Satan and all his imps, drives them out by main force, and takes complete possession of the soul,—they bar the door of their heart against the Saviour, for they do not want such strong measures as his in their case.

Well, sirs, as you say that Christ's requirements are not according to your mind, what would you like them to be? Do you wish to be allowed to continue taking what you call your little drop, which is powerful enough to make you reel across the street? Then there is somebody over yonder who would like to keep his adulteries, and another who would like to keep his petty thefts, and another who would like to keep on with his swearing, and another who would like to retain his covetousness, so that he could still grind the poor to powder, and make money by crushing them. What sin is there, in the whole world, that would be put to death if men were left to pick and choose the Agag which each one wished to save? No; Christ came to save his people from their sins,—not in them; and it is essential to salvation that sin should be repented of, and, being repented of, should be renounced, and that, by the help of God, we should lead a new life, under a new

Master, serving from a new motive, because the grace of God has renewed our spirit.

"Should it be according to thy mind?" No, certainly not; for, putting all reasons into one, it is not the slightest use for you to make any objection to the gospel, for you will be lost if you do not accept it just as it is revealed in the Scriptures. Christ will never alter the gospel one jot or tittle—not the cross of a "t" or the dot of an "i"—to please the biggest man that lives. "Oh! but, really, I am a man of education; am I to be saved in the same way as the man who does not know A from B?" Precisely; there is no other way of salvation for you. There is not one gate for Doctors of Divinity and another for the poor and ignorant. "But I am a person of good character, a matronly woman; am I to be saved just in the same way as a Magdalene?" Precisely the same; there is no other Saviour for you than the one in whom Mary Magdalene delighted and trusted. "But, sir, you do not surely mean to say that all these street Arabs are to go to heaven in the same way as a man who has kept shop, and been respectable, all his life?" Yes, I do; all must go in exactly the same road. Queens and chimney-sweeps must enter heaven by the same gate, or not enter at all. There is but one name given among men whereby we must be saved; there is no other Saviour but Christ Jesus the Lord; he suits every class of persons, big sinners and little ones, if there are any little sinners anywhere. All must come to Christ, and at his feet confess their sin, for God's plan cannot be altered for anyone. My dear sir, we are not going to have any enlargement, or rather, any mystification, of the plan of salvation to suit your profound mind. There will be no golden handles put to the doors of heaven to suit you, my lord, with all your wealth and pride. Nay, nay, nay; come to Christ, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest; but there is no other way of obtaining rest of heart and conscience.

I have thus tried to mention a few of the objections which men make to God's plan of salvation. Now let me ask two or three questions. First, *should not God have his way?* Is it not intolerable that you and I should raise objections at all when the mercy of God, if it ever comes to us, is a pure gift of charity? God may well say to us, "Shall I not do as I will with mine own?" There is no man living who has any absolute right to receive anything from God except destruction. That terrible doom we have all merited, but nothing beyond that. If we were shut up in prison, and kept upon dry bread, so long as we were out of hell, we should still be under obligation to God. If the Lord should choose to show mercy to only one man in the world, he has a perfect right to do so; if he chooses to give it to a few, or if he chooses to give it to all, he has the right to do so. He is absolutely sovereign, and these are the words that he would have every one of us to hear and to heed: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." The crown rights of the King of kings must never be assailed; for us beggars to turn choosers, and to dictate to God what he shall give to us;—

for us condemned criminals to begin to make bargains with God as to how he shall preserve our lives, if he chooses to do so,—oh, this will never do! You know, dear friends, that when we give even a trifling charity, we like to do it in our own way. I remember that, one Christmas-time, a certain gentleman had given away a quantity of meat to many poor people; he had been so generous that he had given away all he had. The next morning, a woman came to him, bringing back the piece of meat which she had received, which was meant for boiling, and she said she wanted to have a piece for roasting. There was none left for changing, so she had to take what had been given to her, or go without any at all. You are quite sure that, the next year, that woman's name was put down among the first to have a Christmas gift, are you not? On the contrary, the gentleman said, "She will not be troubled, next year, either with a boiling piece or a roasting piece from me; I will take good care of that." I think it was quite natural that he should say so, for our common proverb regards it as ingratitude when we "look a gift horse in the mouth." When anything comes to us entirely as a gift, it is not for us to cavil at it, but to accept it; and this is specially true of God's great gift of salvation. O Lord, if thou wilt but save me, save me anyhow! If I may be delivered from this accursed sin of mine, and made pure and holy, do it, Lord, after thine own gracious fashion! It is not for me to suggest any plan to thee, but to leave myself entirely in thy hands, and to let it be according to thy mind.

Further, *is not God's way the best?* The mind of God is so infinitely great, and good, and wise, that it cannot be supposed that, even if he left the plan of salvation to our option, we could choose anything half as good as what he decrees and appoints. Should he, for a single moment, hold his sovereignty in abeyance, and allow us to be kings and princes on our own account, what follies we should perpetrate! We should choose a way of salvation that would not honour God, nor destroy evil, nor even be good for our own selves. Some people would like a heaven into which they could enter without being born again; but what kind of heaven would that be? Some would like to have joy and peace without believing in Christ. Some would like to have eternal felicity, and yet indulge their lusts. This would be an evil of the most awful kind. It is better that sin should bring to man infinite sorrow than that it should be linked with eternal enjoyment. The mischief of it is that it does get linked with enjoyment for a while by foolish men, who forget what must come afterwards; but God has never joined these two things together, it is only wicked men who have pretended to celebrate this unholy marriage. God proclaims a perpetual separation between sin and happiness, and it is well that it should be so.

Now, to conclude this first part of our subject, suppose the plan of salvation should be according to any human mind, *whose mind is to decide what it shall be?* Yours? Nay, mine. And another says, "No, mine." Our proverb rightly says, "Many men, many minds;" and if we were to have salvation arranged according to the mind of each one of us, there would be a pretty quarrel before we left this

place. You say, friend, that it is to be according to your mind; but why not according to your neighbour's mind? If man's mind were to decide it, what should we have? Why, you would all contradict each other, and there would be no plan of salvation at all if God did not settle it once for all.

Then, besides, should it be according to your mind to-day? "Yes," you say, "I have made up my mind." But you will take your mind to pieces to-morrow,—what little there is of it,—and then you will put it together again the next day, and say, "I have made up my mind; I am a man of mind, you know." Ah, yes! we know you, sir. There is a certain tribe of people about, nowadays, who call themselves "men of culture," and they sneer at everybody who does not go in for that kind of boasting. If they were really men of mind, they would never talk like that, for the man who has the most culture generally has enough to be a little modest, and not to brag about what he is. Well, then, if salvation is to be according to man's mind, whose mind is to decide it, and on what day, and at what hour of the day is the verdict of that man's mind to be taken? It is vacillating, changing like the moon, never twice in the same mood on the same day; so salvation cannot be according to our mind, for it would be chaos, it would be destruction, if that were the case.

II. Now, secondly, here is A WARNING: "He will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose."

By this I understand that, *whatever our will may be, God will carry out his own purpose.* As surely as God is God, he will never be defeated in anything. He who is omniscient, and therefore sees the end from the beginning, is also omnipotent, and therefore can work his own will exactly as he chooses,—he will never be baffled by the will of men. I believe in the free agency of man as much as anyone who lives; but I equally believe in the eternal purpose of God. If you ask, "How do you reconcile those beliefs?" I answer,—They have never been at variance yet, so there is no need to attempt to reconcile them. They are like two parallel lines, which will run side by side for ever;—man responsible because he does what he wills, and God infinitely glorious, achieving his own purposes, not only in the world of dead, inert matter, but also through those who are free agents; without changing them in the least degree, leaving them just as free as ever they were, he yet, in every jot and tittle, performs the eternal purpose of his will.

I would also remind you that, though you cavil at God's way of salvation, *God will punish sin just the same.* There is many a man who has said, "I will never believe that God will send men to hell;" but he has himself gone there, and then he has changed his mind in a very remarkable and terrible fashion when it is too late. There are many who say, "It should be this, or it should not be that;" but they do not ask, "What saith the Scripture?" Yet that is the all-important point; for, whatever you may say as to what it should be or should not be, makes no difference to God. He will take less notice of you and your opinion than you do of a gnat or a midge that flies about you on a summer's evening. He is so infinitely great

and good that any opposition you and I may think that we can raise against him shall be less than nothing, and vanity. Shall tow contend with fire, or the wax with the flame? Shall nothing oppose itself to omnipotence? Shall the creature of a day, that is and is not, attempt to wrestle with the Eternal? No, this cannot be; therefore, God will have his way, and he will punish sin.

And, further, my friends, though you may object to God's way of salvation, *others will be saved by it*. Christ did not die in vain. He will rejoice in every one whom he purchased with his blood. He will not lose one of the jewels that are to deck his crown for ever. You may strive against his kingdom, but that kingdom will come when he pleases. The King eternal, immortal, invisible, shall surely reign for ever and ever; and if your voice is not heard in the great Hallelujah chorus of heaven, yet not one of its notes will be missing. Christ shall be glorified to the highest possible degree, whosoever may oppose him. It is well that those who object to God's plan of salvation should know these facts. That is how Christ treated objectors when he was upon the earth. When they murmured at what he told them, he did not tone down the unpalatable truth; he did not say to them, "You are robbing me of my honour and glory, and I shall never prosper;" but he said, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me draw him." On another occasion, he said, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." He did not humble himself to them, but again proclaimed his own truth in all its majesty and sublimity, that they might bow before him and his message.

Just once more, upon this point, let me say that *God will certainly magnify his own name*, whoever may oppose him: "Whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose," shall make no difference to him. His grace comes like the dew, which tarries not for man, neither waits for the sons of men. Oftentimes, he is found of them that seek him not; and to those who were not his people, he says, "Ye are my people;" thus magnifying his own amazing grace. Whoever may stand out against him, he shall lack none of his honour and glory, world without end.

III. This brings us to the third part of our subject, on which I desire to say exactly what Elihu said: "and not I." We cannot be absolutely sure what these three words mean; but, if they mean what I think they do, they teach us a lesson, which I have called A PROTEST.

Whenever you find anyone opposing God, say to yourself, "and not I." When there is any wrong thing being done, and it comes under your notice, say, "and not I." Take care that you go not with a multitude to do evil; do not take upon your tongue just what others may be saying, but bear your individual protest against the evil; even if you stand alone, say, "and not I."

What Elihu did mean, I think, was this. Whoever opposes God should know that *he is not dealing with a man like himself*. If you hear a preacher make a statement, and you feel, "That is not the Word of the Lord," pray God to forgive him for his sin in making it; but if he speaks with the sound of his Master's feet behind him

and what he says is the Word of God, then do not trifle with it. If it be clearly a revealed truth, it may grate against your feelings, and set your teeth on edge; but what of that? You had better get your teeth and your feelings put right, for the truth of God cannot be altered in order to please you. Someone says, "I cannot believe that statement, because it seems too shocking." That is just why I do believe it, for it does me good by shocking me; and if it is in God's Word, I am bound to accept it. "Oh!" you say, "but something within me revolts against it." It is only natural it should do so, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and it naturally cries out against the thing that is most surely true. The supreme majesty of God's Word is that before which we have to bow, and not the insignificant usurpers of our inward feelings, fancies, and whims. "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

Elihu also means, I think, "*I will not be responsible for the man who refuses God's Word.* I will not stand in his place, or take the blame which is due to him. He shall be recompensed, and not I, for I have spoken the truth. I will not bear the responsibility of it. If men choose to refuse it, they must take the consequences; to the Lord alone they must stand or fall."

And, once more, Elihu means, "*If you refuse God's Word, it is not I.* I will not share in your rebellion against him." Ah! my dear hearers, there are some of you who think yourselves very intelligent, and wise, and thoughtful, and you imagine that you know a great deal more than I do, and therefore you refuse to receive God's Word. Well, if you do so, I will not; I am determined about this matter, and I say, with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." And, mark you, by "Jehovah" I mean the Old Testament God. I have never seen him superseded in his own Word, though some men profess that it is so. According to them, the God of the Hebrews was not the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, though Jesus never said so, but quite the reverse. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, is he whom we worship this day; and his character, as it is written out in full in the Old and New Testament, is that which we admire and delight in. Others may have new gods, newly come up, which our fathers knew not; but not I. He who made the heavens and the earth, he who led forth his people out of Egypt, and divided the sea, even the Red Sea, he whose mercy endureth for ever, the God who shines forth all along as the God of a covenanted people to whom he did reveal himself, "this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Learned men may dispute as much as they like about him, but we bow humbly at his feet. We question nothing that he does; we believe it to be right even when we do not understand it; and it is our hope that others will do the same; but if they will not, it will not affect our own decision.

IV. Our last head is, A CHALLENGE AND AN INVITATION.

If there are any who refuse the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, for any reason known only to themselves, we venture to ask them to say what it is: "Therefore speak what thou knowest." It was not in Elihu's mind to tell Job to be silent, and never open his mouth

again. Speech is the glory of man, and freedom of speech, as far as concerns his fellow-creatures, is the right of every man. It is far better that, when there is a difficulty or an objection, it should be fairly stated, than that it should lie smothered up within the soul to breed untold mischief. Therefore, if thou hast an objection to God's Word, write it out, and look at it. Or, if thou carest not to do that, state it, if not to thy friend,—if thou preferest privacy,—state it to thyself; only bring it out, and let it be known. But, at the same time, when thou art speaking, "speak what thou knowest."

Now, what dost thou really know of God? Little enough do the most of us know; but, still, I think we know enough to know that he is not the god of modern times, whom some preach. One single night of frost will destroy millions upon millions of creatures that were happy and enjoyed life; and this is done by that God of whom we are often assured that he cannot possibly punish sin, or put men to pain. But he does it. Hear the cry of the poor seamen, when the storm tosses the great barque, and drives it on the rock. See how everywhere the Lord is a great God and terrible. Even though he condescends to be a Father to those of us who trust in Jesus Christ, his Son, and is gentle as a nurse to us, yet is he the God of thunder and of fire, the great and almighty God, the King who will not be questioned by his subjects, and who will not alter his arrangements to please their fancies.

It is well for us to speak of God as we have found him. He has dealt kindly and graciously with us: "he hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities;" else had we been cast away for ever. We long that others may be able to speak of God in the same way; not saying what they would have him to be, but what he has revealed himself to be, in nature, and in providence, and especially in grace. Let us all come humbly to his feet. He bids us look to his dear Son, and so find peace and salvation. If we will not do so, there is nothing for us but to be driven from his presence, and from the glory of his power, world without end. Will we dare to defy him? Have we the impiety so to do? O God, humble us! Beneath the terror of thy majesty, and the glory of thy righteousness, and the supreme splendour of thy love, bow us down, to accept thy grace, and to become thine for ever and ever! God grant that it may be so, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOB XXXIV.

Verses 1—3. *Furthermore Elihu answered and said, Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge. For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.*

I wish that verse was always true, especially concerning those who hear what purports to be the gospel; I only wish they would test and try what they hear, just as, with their mouth, they taste what they eat. But, as

there are some persons who will eat anything that is set before them, so there are some who will accept anything that they hear, without exercising any spiritual discernment whatever. "It is cleverly put," they say, and therefore they receive it; yet they would scarcely be foolish enough to eat unhealthy food simply because it was skilfully carved.

4, 5. *Let us choose to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment.*

Yes, Job had said something like that, yet not quite that. He had denied the charges of gross sin which his friends brought against him, and he had, in that sense, declared that he was righteous, and so he was. There may have been in Job a little of the spirit which Elihu here denounces; he may, perhaps, have thought that God had not dealt well with him, in letting him fall into so much trouble, seeing that he was a righteous man. This notion, Elihu will not permit to pass unchallenged. Mistaking Job's meaning, he denounces it, just as I have heard preachers sometimes give a description of Calvinism such as it never was, and then they have proceeded to burn the man of straw which they have themselves made. It is one of the easiest things in the world to misquote or misinterpret your opponent's statement, and then denounce it, and think you have confuted him, whereas you have only dissipated the chimera of your own brain. Elihu proceeds to deal with Job in this fashion.

6—9. *Should I lie against my right? my wound is incurable without transgression. What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water? Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity, and walketh with wicked men. For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.*

He did not mean that Job did really go into the company of the wicked; but that, in his saying that it had been no profit to him that he should delight himself with God,—which Elihu declares that Job said, though I do not remember that he ever did say so,—he was making himself the associate of ungodly men. Any of us would be doing so if we, in our sorrowful moments, should say that we had derived no profit from delighting ourselves with God. It would not be true; it would be a rebellious and wicked speech, and, in some degree, it would be an atheistic speech.

10. *Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.*

That was well spoken. Let us never, even for a moment, imagine that God can do anything that is unrighteous or unjust. God is a sovereign, and therefore he may do as he wills with his own grace; but there is never any injustice in any of the acts of his sovereignty. He is infinitely wise, and just, and merciful, in all that he does. He does as he wills, but he never wills to do anything that could possibly be better done. His own will is the best that can be.

11—17. *For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment. Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. Shall even he that hateth right govern?*

Do you suppose that it could be so,—that the Governor of all the earth should hate that which is right? This would be rank blasphemy.

17. *And wilt thou condemn him that is most just?*

Wilt thou, poor puny mortal, arraign the Most High, and dare to condemn him who is most just?

18, 19. *Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands.*

This is the same kind of argument as Paul used in writing to the Romans: "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Shall the potter's clay resist the power of the potter, who assuredly has the right to do what he wills with his own clay? And if we do not speak lightly against princes, much less should we speak against the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose infinite majesty filleth all things. What, after all, are princes, and rich men, and great men, in comparison with the great God who made them all? "They all are the work of his hands."

20. *In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand.*

An invisible power takes away the strength of which they boasted, and then, what does the prince become, with all his glory, or the warrior, with all his victories? What, but so much corruption that must be buried out of sight?

21, 22. *For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

How gloriously is this great truth put! This Elihu was a man of real eloquence; what a weighty sentence is this! How worthy to be treasured up in the memory! "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Not even in the grave can they be concealed from the eye of God; and if it were possible for them to hide beneath the skirts of death himself, yet would God perceive them, and drag them forth to judgment.

23. *For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God.*

For, if man were ill treated, and more were laid upon him than ought to be, he would have cause to enter into judgment with his Maker. But God will never compromise his own eternal holiness after such a fashion as this. He will not lay upon man more than is right. You who are greatly afflicted, and in sore distress, ought to believe this; and if the Spirit of God shall give you a full conviction of the truth of it, it will afford you great comfort. The waves of your distress will come just as far as God wills, but at his bidding they must stay, as stays the sea in the fulness of its pride when Jehovah says to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Therefore, leave thy case in his hands, for he will not lay upon thee more than is right.

24—28. *He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead. Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed. He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others; because they turned back from him, and would not consider any of his ways: so that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted.*

It is a dreadful thing for princes and great men when the poor begin to cry unto God against them. God will soon take up that quarrel; for, while the cries of mere politicians and partisans are unheeded by him, the cry of the afflicted always commands his attention, and he will, in due time, rectify all that is wrong.

29. *When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?*

This is a most comforting question; for, if God gives quietness to the spirit, nobody can really trouble you. When Christ has once spoken peace to our heart, and given us a holy calm, then are we glad because we be quiet, and who is he that can raise a storm in our soul again? "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," also passeth all distraction. It cannot be broken by all the devils in hell. Oh, how blessed is this assurance!

29. *And when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?*

If God will not be seen, who can possibly see him? If he grows wroth with a man, and leaves him, what can that man do? When even his own beloved people no longer see his face, what joy can be theirs? What can make day when the sun is gone? What can make joy when Christ is gone?

29, 30. *Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only: that the hypocrite reign not, lest the people be ensnared.*

God has ways of dealing with his children by which he weeds out hypocrites, lays them low, and does not suffer them to have rule over his people.

31. *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more:*

That is the spirit of the true-born child of God: "Father, I know that what I have suffered is a chastisement from thy hand, and I accept it as such. 'I will not offend any more,' I quit the sin that grieved thee."

32. *That which I see not teach thou me:*

"Show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Point out to me the evil which thou wouldst have me put away."

32—35. *If I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest. Let men of understanding tell me, and let a wise man hearken unto me. Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom.*

This man is getting proud and conceited, I think. He spoke well when he was defending God against all charges and complaints; but now that he turns upon Job, the patriarch is a wiser man and a better man than he is. Elihu is not fit to unloose the latchets of Job's shoes, yet he begins to accuse him. It sometimes happens that dogs bark at their masters, yet the masters are not to be blamed; and it is not always the best man who reproves others. Sometimes, a very foolish man will be the loudest in his rebukes of those who are wiser and better than himself, and will find fault with those whom he ought to commend. It was so in the case of Elihu and Job.

36, 37. *My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.*

Well, thank God, we are not going to be judged by Elihu, nor by any other of our fellow-creatures; to our own Master we stand or fall, and if we trust in him, he will make us to stand even in the great day of judgment itself, blessed be his holy name!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—211, 597, 570.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A SINCERE SUMMARY, AND A SEARCHING SCRUTINY.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 22ND, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 29th, 1882.

"I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee."—Psalm cxix. 168.

"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."—Psalm cxix. 176.

IF anyone says that these two texts contradict one another, I say that they do not. They form a paradox, and they are both true, and true of the same man, at the same time. I will read them to you again: "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee." "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

I purpose to take our first text as *a sincere summary of a godly man's life,* and our second text as *a searching scrutiny,* or as the result of a searching scrutiny, which looks below the surface, and then comes to a conclusion, not contradictory to the former one, yet supplementary to it.

I. First, then, dear friends, our first text is A SINCERE SUMMARY OF A GODLY MAN'S LIFE. Looking back, he can say of it in general, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee."

First, let me say that *it is needful that we should have so lived that this shall be the summary of our life;* for if we have not so lived, what evidence have we that we have been born again,—that we have passed from death unto life,—that we have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and brought into the way of holiness? If our life is not different from what it used to be, how can we try to deceive ourselves with the idea that we are converted? If our lives are no better than the lives of unregenerate men, what reason can we have for believing that we are regenerate? After all, at the last, we shall be judged according to our works. "By their fruits ye shall know them," is a test that still stands good, and will stand good even to the end. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for

whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And, in looking back, if our life has been ungodly,—if it has been wanton and unchaste,—if it has not been characterized by sobriety, honesty, prayerfulness, consecration, what can we say of it? We shall have to judge ourselves to be still "out of the way," and to have need that we should turn to God with full purpose of heart, and seek what, evidently, we have not at present found. If the grace which we are supposed to have received has not made us to differ both from our former self and from men of the world, then it is not the true grace of God.

Next, whenever a man can truly say, with the psalmist, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies," *it is a fruit of grace.* It is not a product of the legal spirit; it is not a result of free will unhelped by God's grace and love. Wherever there is even a spark of holiness, it must have come from that great central fire which is in the heart of God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." There is not on earth a rare flower of loveliness and purity which is not an exotic; it is blooming in a clime to which it is a stranger. God has planted it with his own right hand.

So, then, he who can thus sum up his life has nothing whereof to glory, for he has received from God everything of good there is in it, and therefore he gives all the glory of it to the Giver, and takes none of it to himself. It is faith that works by love, purifying the soul, and producing the devout and godly character; and faith never claims any honour for itself, for it is itself the gift of God. Christ says much in praise of faith because faith says so much in praise of Christ; and faith is used, in the covenant of grace, as a means of blessing, because it excludes boasting, and gives all the glory to God, who works all that is good within us. So, you see, dear friends, that there is nothing of legality in what I am saying now when I testify that a godly, Christian man, when he sums up his life, can say, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies."

Next, *this summary of life is excellent for its breadth.* Notice how it is worded; it comprehends the precepts and the testimonies of the Lord; that is, the practical and the doctrinal parts of true religion. There are some persons who appear to be very scrupulous concerning the precepts, and they are very anxious to keep them. So far, they do well; but as to the doctrines of grace, they say, "We do not know much about them," and they appear to think that it is not at all necessary that they should know about them. A very large part of God's Word, which teaches most precious truth, they slur. They think that it does not matter to them. Should they not believe according to the denomination in which they were born or brought up? They say that there is no particular necessity for them to be so diligent in searching and knowing the Word. The psalmist thought not so, but he said to the Lord, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies." I feel that I am as much bound to believe right as to act right; and it is just as truly a sin to believe error, when I can learn the truth, as it is to commit iniquity.

We are responsible to God for the use we make of our understandings, as well as for the exercise of our affections. There is nothing in the Word of God to justify men in believing what they like, and anyone who neglects to search out the truth commits a sin of omission. He who holds an error, which he might see to be an error if he looked in the mirror of God's Word, is guilty of rebellion against the teaching of God. If we would live a life such as we can look back upon with pleasure, we ought to try to keep the testimonies as well as the precepts of the Lord.

I have met with some people, who used to be more numerous than they are now, who were very strenuous about the doctrines of grace. If anybody differed from their view of the doctrines, they at once said that he was unsound. I should hardly like to repeat the hard things they used to say about such a person; but, certainly, to be sound in the truth was the grand thing with them. And I do not condemn them for that, but I do blame them because, sometimes, practical preaching seemed irksome to them, and the enforcement of the precepts of the Word made them wrathful; they could not endure it. You could tickle their palates, and delight them with a good strong sermon on the doctrines of grace; but when you came to insist upon holy walking, they would turn upon their heel, and say that the preacher was "legal." Now, inasmuch as I before said that, to neglect God's testimonies, is an evil, so I add that, to neglect the precepts, is an equal evil. Be thou, O man of God, as earnest to do the right as to believe the right; and, on the other hand, as earnest to believe the right as to do the right! Thy whole nature should be subject to God. He is to be thy Teacher as well as thy Law-giver. Wilt thou not sit at the feet of Jesus, like Mary did, to learn of him, as well as rise up, like Martha did, to serve him? If thou wilt not, then thou givest to him a lame and limping obedience. "The legs of the lame are not equal," and thine obedience is lame, since the legs of it are not equal. There is a long doctrine and a short obedience; or a long precept and a short doctrine. Be it not so with thee, O man of God, if thou wouldst look back upon a well-ordered life! Happy shall that man be who can say, "Ever since that glad day when I was brought as a penitent to my Master's feet, I have studiously endeavoured to do what he has bidden me do, and I have just as earnestly shunned and turned away from everything which I have known to be sin. I praise the Lord that he has helped me to keep my garments unspotted from the world." But if he would be a complete Christian, he must be able to add, "I have also striven to believe all that is taught in the Word of God. I have not given myself up blindly to be led by priest or minister. I felt that God had given me a conscience for which I was responsible, not to my fellow-men, but to him; so I have gone to the law and to the testimony, testing everything by that infallible standard. I have not sat down in idleness, taking things for granted because they were preached with brilliant oratory; but, like the Bereans, I have searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so or not." Ah, beloved! it will make a soft pillow for your head if, in the retrospect of life, you

can say, "I have made the law of God, in its teachings and in its commands, to be the rule of my whole life." God grant that you may have that satisfaction at the last!

Further, dear friends, *this summary is excellent for its length*, as well as for its breadth, for here the man of God says, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies." I do not know how long the psalmist had kept them, but it seems to me natural that he should make this summary towards the close of his life. I pray that it may be so with us when we come to die. I have known the grey-headed old man—how well I knew him, and how greatly I loved him, for I mean my venerable grandfather,—who, when he was dying, could say, "That which I preached when I first entered the pulpit I have preached to the last. For fifty and eight years, to the best of my knowledge I have preached nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. I have nothing to retract of the testimony which I have given, for what the Spirit of God taught me, that have I taught to others." And he could equally have said at the last, "I have, as a father, trained my children in God's fear, and they are all following in my footsteps. I have, as a pastor, watched over my flock with sedulous care. I have set them an example which they can safely follow; and there is no man who can truthfully lay a charge against me, for in all uprightness and integrity have I walked before God." Mark you, this dear old man was a Calvinist, an out-and-out preacher of free grace, who would not for a moment take the slightest credit to himself for anything that he was, or had done; yet he could not have said less than this unless he had pretended to possess a modesty which was not true, and mimicked a humility which was based on falsehood. In like manner, may we be kept, by the grace of God, clear of all trusting in our works; but, at the same time, may we abound in good works to the glory of God, and both in thought and in life, may we be clear in the sight of God. Oh! how I have envied that first Quaker, George Fox, who, with all the eccentricities of his life, could honestly say, on his death-bed, "I am clear, I am clear, I am clear of the blood of all men." This is the highest ambition that a minister's heart may indulge,—that he should be able to say that at the last, as other men of God have been able to do.

So, you see, this is a blessed summary as to length as well as breadth.

Above all things, *it is excellent from its cause.* Notice how the psalmist says to the Lord, "I have kept *thy* precepts and *thy* testimonies." That is what the true man of God still says, "I followed the precept because it was God's precept. I did not care whether a Church or a Council of any sort had set its stamp upon it. It was God's precept, and that was enough for me. And I believed the doctrine because it was his testimony. It might not be the testimony of any Reformer, or Confessor, but it was enough for me that it was God's testimony." That should be the reason for our conviction and our action also.

The psalmist kept God's precepts and testimonies because all his ways were before God. He felt that God was watching him, he lived under the consciousness of God's presence with him both by

night and by day; and, therefore, he dared not believe anything contrary to God's truth, or act contrary to God's command. "Thou God seest me" either held him in check or else impelled him onward. This is the way for us also to live. Dear friends, I pray that you may live thus.

I think the psalmist also meant, when he said that all his ways were before God, that they were under God's smile of approval. He not only observed, but he communed with and commended his servant. Another psalmist, or perhaps the writer of these words which form our text, said, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living;" and Enoch might have said, "I have walked with God from day to day. Communion with him has been my continual delight, and all my ways have been before him." The Book of Psalms begins thus: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." His ways are ever before God, and he has respect unto the law of the Lord evermore.

Such a life as that, dear friends, *is excellent from its use.* It is sure to be a life of happiness, even though it should bring on persecution. It is certain also to be a useful life. It is an example which your children, and your children's children may safely follow. It is an argument for the gospel which the most sceptical cannot refute, and it is a most blessed way of propagating that gospel, for men are more often convinced by our actions than by our words. Seek after it, dear friends, and let your lives be such that you may close them with the words of my first text: "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee."

II. Now let us pause a moment, and observe that the psalmist, after he had spoken thus, and spoken quite sincerely and truly, yet felt that he must close his long life's summary in another fashion. He then uttered our second text, which I called a SEARCHING SCRUTINY: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

His life was perfect, after the manner of Scriptural perfection, but when it was carefully examined and scrutinized, it was found to be manifestly imperfect. Suppose you take a needle, one of the very best that has ever been made;—any seamstress would be glad to use it. She would never think of sending a packet of such needles back, and saying that they were not good. They are bright, untarnished, sharp, smooth, all that they should be, quite perfect needles. But just put one of them under a microscope,—I have done so,—and then see what it is like. Why, now, it is a bar of steel,—rough and ugly-looking, tending towards a point at one end, but certainly very blunt. That is just the difference between the microscopic examination and the ordinary observation of our poor eyes. So, the life of a believer may be like that of Job, "perfect and upright," but when it comes under the scrutiny of an eye that is illuminated by the Spirit of God, and touched with the heavenly eye-salve, quite another verdict is given; and, tremblingly, with

many tears, the confession is poured into the ear of God, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep;" followed by the petition, "Seek thy servant;" and the renewed declaration, "for I do not forget thy commandments."

Here is, first, *a confession of imperfection and of helplessness.* It means really a continual imperfection and helplessness, for the Hebrew verb relates not only to the past, but to the present. It might just as well be read, "I am still going astray like a lost sheep;" indeed, it must be so read, for the psalmist goes on to say, "Seek thy servant." He would not have offered such a prayer if his confession had only related to something that was at an end. There is, here, not only imperfection, and the tendency to a continuous imperfection, but there is also an acknowledgment of helplessness. The psalmist does not say, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep, but I can return when I please." No; he prays to the Lord, "Seek thy servant," as if the only help for him lay in the search which the great Shepherd would make, and the consequent restoration which would come by his gracious and powerful hand.

Let us just think for a little while, and then I feel sure that we shall soon say that we must confess to God as the psalmist did. I mean that each one of those here present who have led godly lives will still have to say to the Lord, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Think first of God's precepts. Have we never gone astray in heart from any one of them? Suppose you never have departed from them in life,—which is a very charitable supposition,—have you never in heart felt the precepts to be hard? Had you been really perfect, it would have been easy, it would have been natural to you to keep them. Have you not sometimes had to whip yourself up to a duty? The need of being whipped up to it proves that evil is still remaining within you. Then, have you never forgotten a precept? Lives there a man who has carried out all the precepts of God without forgetting any one of them? I would like to see the brother who has done so; but such a brother I never expect to see.

I think that, with the most of us, it is thus. There is a certain duty, and we try to do it with all our hearts; but, meanwhile, we forget another duty which is just as binding upon us as the first was. We look right on, and so we overlook the duties that lie on the right hand and on the left. The very intensity which makes us earnest about one thing often prevents our attending to another thing which is equally important, and thus we present to God one duty stained with the blood of another. I have known a father, in aiming at being firm with his children, err by being too severe; and far oftener have I known others, intent upon being kind to their children, who have grown like Eli, and have winked at their sin. That is but one instance among thousands of the evil I am deploring. A man may say, "I shall rebuke So-and-so for his fault;" but he does it too sharply, and therein he errs. Or, afraid of being too severe, he says nothing, and therein he errs. Did you ever, in all your life, do any one thing so well that it could not possibly have been done better? The difference between the good there was in what you did, and the good there might have been in it, is just so

much of deficiency; and sin is any want of conformity to perfection. Whether you fall short of the mark or go over the line, matters little; in either case, you have missed the perfection God demands. If you do not reach his standard, you have nót yet attained to perfect holiness, and there is still something of sin to confess.

The precepts of the Lord are so broad that they touch the secret imagination of the heart. Is there a man living who never has an unclean desire? "I fought against it," says one. I know you did; but the very desire was sinful. Or, if it has not come to a desire, was there never an impure imagination that crossed your mind? "Yes, it just flitted across my mind," you say. Well, in proportion as you yielded to it, in that proportion it was a guilty thing. Ay, —I must say it,—if even a dream has had anything of sin in it, and you have been complacent over it, it detects the sin that is within you, for were you really perfect, even the very passing thought, though it were but as a bird of the air that flew above your head, would still, by casting a shadow over your spirit, cause you vexation and sorrow. Keep that microscope close at hand, and it need not have very strong lenses either; only look fairly into your own life, first, by the light of the law of God, and, secondly, by the light of your obligations to Christ who hath redeemed you with his precious blood, and then I feel sure that you will have to say, "I fall short even of my own ideal, and I am persuaded that my ideal falls very far short of what God's ideal of perfection is."

Has it not often struck you, dear friends, as a very wonderful thing that good men—some of the best of men who have ever lived—have nevertheless been guilty of things which, at the present moment, we regard as heinous crimes? Mr. Whitefield had a strong objection to slavery, but still it did not seem to him to be wrong to have a number of negroes at the orphan house at Savannah, and to speak of them as his goods and chattels. That was a matter about which the conscience of the good man was not then enlightened. We do ill if we condemn men too strongly for things about which no enlightenment has come to them; but are they not themselves guilty in the sight of God? Of course, they are. There are men, nowadays, carrying on trades that are doing mischief and only mischief to the populace, but they are not aware of the evil, their conscience is not enlightened about it.

To take another line of thought, suppose a man is worth many hundreds of thousands of pounds, and all the while there are millions of people abroad perishing for lack of the gospel; and, often, the great deficiency of the Missionary Societies is not in the men, but in the means to send out the preachers of the gospel. Is that man right, before the living God, who says, "I am not my own, for I am bought with a price, and all that I am and have belongs to Christ," and yet who nevertheless remains immensely rich,—rich beyond anything that he or his children after him can ever want? Yet, possibly, his conscience is not enlightened about that matter, and it is no very great crime in his judgment; neither may you and I condemn him, for our own conscience is probably quite as much in the dark upon something else. But whenever anybody, who is very

rich, gets up, and says, "I am a perfect man," I feel inclined to say what Christ said to the young man who thought that he was perfect, "Sell all that thou hast." Somebody asks, perhaps, "Does Christ propose that test to every one of us?" No, certainly not; but to any of us who say that we are perfect, that test may be applied. If you are such a perfect man, see if you can do as our Lord said, sell all that you have, and give the proceeds to the poor. I have known a man sing—

> "Yet if I might make some reserve,
> And duty did not call,
> I love my God with zeal so great
> That I should give him all;"—

but, all the while, he has been trying to feel whether it was a threepenny-piece or a fourpenny-piece that he was going to give to the collection.

As I begin to think of these various things which I have mentioned,—just casting, as it were, a little ray of light upon them, not the great light of the eternal purity of God,—I cannot understand how there can be any man, even though he has kept God's precepts and testimonies as far as he could, who, nevertheless, is not bound to say, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

But, further, suppose it to be possible that we have not gone astray from the precepts of the Lord, how about his testimonies? Is any man here prepared to say, "I feel that I have, in every respect, believed the truth as it is revealed in God's Word, and that I have never erred from it"? Do you believe all the truth, and all the truth in its right proportions and relations? And do you give due emphasis to each truth at the right moment? Have you never believed that which afterwards you found to be incorrect and false? Possibly, you have not wilfully done this; but have you done it at all? Think of Augustine, that mighty master and teacher in the Church of God, sitting down in his old age, and writing his "Confessions." Alas! even he found that he had plenty of things to confess and to amend; and it must be so with us too. The very man who can say, "In the main, I have preached the same things all through my ministry;" yet, nevertheless, adds, "I preached them as far as I knew them, but I did not know them at the first as I learned them afterwards. I did not know this truth in relation to that truth; and I sometimes misrepresented God in my very zeal to give a correct statement, and I slew one truth in my defence of another." Ah, friends! we are all so fallible; nay, more than that, we do all so sadly fail, in one way or another, that we must meekly bow our head, and each one say, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." I am afraid that I might have put this matter much more strongly than I have ventured to lay it before you, and still have been within the mark; but there I leave it, as I want to speak upon one more point.

In that prayer of the psalmist, "Seek thy servant," I discern *conscious faith in the divine power*. He seems to say, "Lord, I am as silly as a sheep; but if I were only a sheep, I could not pray. I

am a servant, too,—'thy servant.' It is my joy, it is my glory, to be thy servant. Now, Lord, because I am thy servant, seek me. Do not lose me, Lord. Thou hast bought me with thy blood. I am seeking thee, Lord; so, come thou, and seek me. I want to be perfectly holy, come and help me now. Forgive every sin of omission or of commission. Draw me away from every mistake. Draw me nearer, and yet nearer to thyself. 'Seek thy servant.'" Perhaps you are ill, or even dying; well, living or dying, this prayer may still suit you: "Seek me, Lord, 'seek thy servant.'"

Then, lastly, comes in that sweet reflection, "For I do not forget thy commandments." "I have a love to them, I have a longing for them, and I am sure that this never grew in my heart by nature. It is the gift of thy grace; and, because thou hast put it there, Lord, and thou hast begun to work in me, finish thy work, I pray thee. Lord, thou hast made me long to be quit of every false way; therefore, deliver me from it. Thou hast made me wish to be transparent and sincere, thou hast made me hungry and thirsty to be like thyself, then wilt thou not satisfy the craving thou hast thyself imparted?

"'The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.'

"If I hold an error, yet thou knowest that I wish not to hold it. Show me that it is an error, and I will have done with it at once. And if I am acting in good faith in a wrong way, Lord, do thou but let me see that it is wrong, and, cost what it may, I will do the right, and cease from the evil."

This is a blessed way in which to close our life, but there is a more blessed thing still, and that is, after all is said and done, and after God's grace has been praised for everything that is lovely and of good repute that it has wrought in us, then to cast bad works and good works all away, and just look to the cross, and to the cross alone, and see our life in Jesu's death, our healing in his wounds, our glory in his shame, our heaven in his anguish. Look, saint! Look now. Sinner, you may do the same. Where the saint's salvation is, there is yours too. And if the greybeard, hoary with years of honour and of virtue, gathering up his feet in the bed, knows no better or brighter hope than that of being justified through the righteousness of Christ and washed in his blood, it is a joy to know that the same hope is free to you, guilty ones, who have not kept the precepts or the testimonies of God. Turn you to Christ on Calvary; cast your eyes on him who, like the brazen serpent, is lifted up that every sin-bitten one may look unto him, and live. Oh, by his grace, look unto him now, and you shall live, for never soul looked to him, and died while looking there.

God bless you, dear friends, for Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—185, 232, 119 (SONG II.), 538.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ROMANS VII., AND VIII. 1—4.

Chapter vii. Verses 1—3. *Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.*

He merely states this as an illustration.

4. *Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

While we were under the law, we could not come into the bonds of the new covenant,—the covenant of grace. But, through the death of Christ, we are dead to the law, and therefore we are set free from the principle and covenant of law, and we have come under the covenant of grace.

5. *For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.*

Sin is the transgression of the law. Therefore, out of the law, by reason of our corruption, springs sin. And, in our past lives, we did indeed find sin to be very fruitful. It grew very fast in our members, and it brought forth much "fruit unto death."

6. *But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

No longer is the message to us, "This do, and thou shalt live." No more are we slaves under bondage; but we have come into a new state, we are free, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God; and what we now do is done out of a spirit of love, and not of fear. We are not seeking after holiness in order to be saved by it, neither do we seek to escape from sin because we are under any fear of being cast into hell. We have another spirit altogether within us.

7. *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid.*

Nay, so far from being sin, the law is the great detective of sin, discovering it, and letting us know what sin really is.

7, 8. *Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.*

Or, "covetousness." The very fact that God said to us, "Do it not," wrought upon our nature so that we wanted to do it, and that which God commanded, which was a matter of indifference to us while we were in ignorance of his will, became, by reason of the depravity of our hearts, a thing to be resisted just because he had enjoined it upon us. Ah, me! what wicked hearts are ours that fetch evil even out of good!

8, 9. *For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

"I did not know how sinful I was until God's commandment came to me. Sin seemed to be dead within me, and I thought myself a righteous man; but when the law of God came home to my heart and conscience, and I understood that even a sinful thought would ruin me, that a hasty

word had the essence of murder in it, and that the utmost uncleanness might lurk under the cover of what seemed a mere custom of my fellow-men,—when I found out all this, sin did indeed live, but I died so far as righteousness was concerned."

10—13. *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid.*

"If I sinned the more when God's commandment was revealed to me; and if, by the light of the law, sin was made more apparent to me, and became so exceeding sinful that it drove me to despair, and so to commit still worse sin; the fault was not in the law, but in sin, and in me, the sinner."

13, 14. *But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual:*

The law of the Lord is a far higher thing than it seems to be in the esteem of many people. Talk not of it as a mere "decalogue." It has far-reaching hands, and it affects the secret thoughts and purposes of men, and even their stray imaginations come under its supremacy. "The law is spiritual."

14. *But I am carnal, sold under sin.*

"I am carnal." There is the source of all the mischief,—a disobedient and rebellious subject, not an irksome law. The law is good enough, it is absolutely perfect; "but," says the apostle, "I am carnal,"—fleshly,—"sold under sin."

15. *For that which I do I allow not:*

The man himself does that which is evil, but his conscience revolts against it.

15. *For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*

This is a strange contradiction,—a man who has grace enough to will to do good, and yet does it not. There are two men in the one man,—the new nature struggling against the old nature. This must be a renewed man who talks in this fashion, or else he could not say that he hated sin; yet there must be a part of him still imperfect, or else he would not do that which he hates.

16. *If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.*

"If I do that against which my will and my conscience rebel, so far, the better part of me owns the goodness of the law, though the baser part of me rebels against it."

17. *Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

The renewed man still stands out against sin. His heart is not wishful to sin, but that old nature within him will sin even to the end.

18, 19. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*

Oh, how often have men, who have been struggling after holiness, had to use these words of the apostle! The more holy they become, the more they realize that there is still a something better beyond them, after which they struggle, but to which they cannot yet attain; so still they cry, "The good that we would we do not: but the evil which we would not, that we do."

20. *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

The true man—the newborn man—is struggling after that which is right. The real "I", the immortal "*ego*", is still pressing forward, like a ship beating up against wind and tide, and striving to reach the harbour where it shall find perfect rest. Oh, what struggles, what contentions, what fightings, there are within the men and women in whom the grace of God is working mightily! Those who have but little grace can take things easily, and swim with the current; but where grace is mighty, sin will fight for the mastery, though it must yield ultimately, for there can never be any true peace until it is subdued.

21. *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

Speaking for myself, I can say that, often, when I am most earnest in prayer, stray thoughts will come into my mind to draw me off from the holy work of supplication; and when I am most intently aiming at humility, then the shadow of pride falls upon me. Do not gracious men generally find it so? If their experience is like that of the apostle Paul, or like that of many another child of God whose biography one delights to read, it is so, and it will be so.

22—24. *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

These are birth-pangs, the throes and anguish of a regenerated spirit. The Christian man is fighting his way to sure and certain victory; so, the more of this wretchedness that he feels, the better, if it be only caused by a consciousness that sin is still lurking within him, and that he longs to be rid of it.

25. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Chapter viii. Verse 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

Some people talk about "getting out of the 7th chapter, into the 8th." But who made this into an eighth chapter? Certainly, the Holy Spirit did not. There are no chapters in the Epistle as he inspired Paul to write it, the whole of it runs straight on without a break: "There is therefore now no condemnation"—while struggling, fighting, warring, contending,—

2. *For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

"Hath made *me* free"—that is, the real "*I*" of which he wrote a little while before—the true man himself: "'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' I have broken its bonds, I am a free man. Contending against its usurpation, I have escaped from under its yoke, and I shall yet tread sin under my feet, and God shall bruise even Satan himself under my feet shortly."

3. *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

That he has done most effectually.

4. *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

Oh, what a blessed thing it is to be able to walk freely, "not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," even though, all the while, there is, within the soul, this strife that the apostle has been describing!

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

NEITHER FORSAKEN NOR FORGOTTEN.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 29TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, November 5th, 1882.

"Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."—Isaiah xlix. 16.

YOU have probably noticed, dear friends, while reading the chapter from which our text is taken, that it seems to divide itself into two parts. The first portion concerns that glorious Servant of God, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God," even our Divine Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is, in this part of the chapter, somewhat of complaint; Christ was, as it were, uttering one of his Gethsemane groans when he said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah, and my work with my God." As far as our Lord's personal ministry among the Jewish people was concerned, it did seem as if he had laboured in vain, for almost all of them rejected him, and they even imprecated an awful curse upon themselves and their descendants when they said, "His blood be on us, and on our children." He is here represented as crying out before Jehovah concerning this apparent failure of his earthly mission; and an answer is at once given to him which must have been eminently satisfactory to our Saviour's spirit, for he adds, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Oh, what joy must have filled the heart of our Divine Master, even in the depths of his agony, as he saw that, through his death, all nations should ultimately behold the light of God's salvation! What though Israel for a while rejected him? Yet multitudes of the Gentiles would receive him; and then, by-and-by, in the fulness of time, the Jews would also receive him, and own as King the Nazarene whom once they crucified on Calvary.

The second part of the chapter, singularly enough, relates to the Israelitish Church, and, to a large extent, to the whole Church of God, and it also contains a complaint. In the expressive language of verse 13, God bids the heavens and the earth rejoice: "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." Yet, even while that jubilant note is pealing over sea and land, there is heard the wailing of poor forsaken Zion,—Judæa's Church, the ancient Church of the living God; and she sighs, "'Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.' He is blessing the Gentiles, but I am left unblessed. He is gathering multitudes unto himself, to glorify his Son; but his poor Israel, his ancient choice, his first love, he seems to have left out of all reckoning, 'Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.'" Then comes the Lord's answer, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Israel shall yet own her King, her salvation waits for the appointed time. There is a high destiny in store for the Israel of God; and many shall yet see the day when he, who died as King of the Jews, shall live again to wear that title, and to be acknowledged as the head of all the house of Abraham.

My object, in speaking upon the familiar and precious words of our text, is just this. Sometimes, you and I get into the same sad condition as Zion was then in, and we fancy that God has forgotten us, so I want to show you that, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord gives to us an answer similar to that which he gave to sorrowful Zion, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Upon that short sentence I shall try now to speak to you.

I. First, let us think, for a while, upon THE FEAR EXPRESSED, the fear in the hearts of God's people, which led to the utterance of our text. In verse 14, this fear is thus expressed, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

This fear has been felt by very many. Fear is a most contagious and infectious thing. When it has taken hold on one person, it has been often known to spread to many others till a terrible panic has resulted from a very slight cause. Here is the whole Jewish Church expressing the fear that God has forgotten her. I feel sure that I am not now addressing such a church as that; I hope that the most of those now present know that God has not forgotten them, and that they are walking in the light of his countenance so that they do not imagine that Jehovah has forsaken them. But, still, this fear has darkened, shall I say, every sky, and passed before the window of every spirit? Well, I will not go quite that length; yet I know that there must be but very few of us who have not, at one time or another, naughtily whispered to our own heart, if we have not said it aloud, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." We have gone up to the house of God with our brethren, and we have seen them very happy. The Word of God has been precious to them, and they have seemed to enjoy it

to the full; but we could not feed upon it, or get a glimpse of the Well-beloved; and we have gone out of the place sighing, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Have you never had that thought? If you never have, I hope you never will; but I fear that the most of us have, at some time or other, been subject to that distressing complaint.

And *it has sometimes been very plaintively expressed.* It is so in the text. I think I hear the mountains echoing the joyous voice of God, and the very skies reverberating with the song of the redeemed; and then, in between the breaks of the glad chorus, I catch this little mournful note, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Perhaps it is all the more plaintive because the tone seems to indicate that Zion felt that she deserved to have it so. She thought herself so insignificant, so sinful, so provoking, that it was no wonder that the great Jehovah should forget her in her littleness, and that the pure and holy God should turn away his face from such iniquity as hers. Brothers and sisters, I feel sure that you and I must have been in that state in which we could weep and groan and sigh because of the joy in the air of which we could not partake, the songs in which we could not unite unless we became utter hypocrites. We heard the sweet strains of the holy merriment in the Father's house, but we felt that we could not join in it; and we sat by ourselves mourning, with our harps hanging on the willows, while everyone around us only increased our grief in proportion to his own delight. I am trying to speak to such troubled souls; God comfort them! There are many such, and their grief is great.

And some, too, are very obstinate while they are in that condition, for our text contains *a very unreasonable complaint.* Read the latter part of the 13th verse: "Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." Yet, in the teeth of that double declaration, Zion said, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Ah! dear friends, our complaints of God are generally groundless. We get into a state of mind in which we say, "God has forsaken us," when he is really dealing with us more than he was wont to do. A child who is feeling the strokes of the rod is very foolish to say, "My father has forgotten me." No; those very blows, under which he is smarting, are reminders that his father does not forget him; and your trials and your troubles, your depressions and your sorrows, are tokens that you are not forgotten of God. The chastening which is guaranteed to every legitimate son is coming to you. If you had not been chastened, there would have been far more cause for saying, "My Lord hath forgotten me." Besides, dear friend, you have had some comforts though you have had many sorrows; you can say, "Comforts mingle with my sighs." Do not forget that. It is not all gall and wormwood; there is so much honey as greatly to mitigate the bitterness. Think of that, and do not obstinately stand to a word which, perhaps, you spoke in haste. If you have said, "My Lord hath forgotten me," call back the word, for it cannot be true. You have slandered him who can never forget one of his own people. And if

you have said, "Jehovah hath forsaken me," again I ask you to call back the evil and false word, and eat it. Never let it be heard again, for it is impossible that Jehovah should change, or that the immutable love of his infinite heart should ever die out. Be not obstinate about this matter, I implore you; yet I have known some of God's people stick to this grave falsehood, to their own grievous wounding and hurt.

I suppose that Zion came to this conclusion *because she was in banishment.* She was away from the land that flowed with milk and honey, and she was suffering in exile. Is this the conclusion to be drawn from all suffering? Does the vine say, "The vinedresser hath forsaken me because he prunes me so sharply"? Does the invalid say, "The physician hath forgotten me because he gives me such bitter medicine"? Shall the patient, beneath the knife, say, "The surgeon hath forsaken me because he cuts even to the bone"? You see at once that there is no reasonableness about such talk, so dismiss it at once. "Judge not the Lord" by outward providences, any more than "by feeble sense," but trust him even when you can see no trace of his goodness to you. "Let God be true, and" every circumstance, as well as "every man, a liar;" for God must keep his promise to his people. He is immutable; he cannot possibly change. He must be true to every word that has gone forth out of his mouth. The fear that God may forsake and forget his own, if obstinately indulged, will certainly deserve to be set down among the wanton and unreasonable transgressions of his people against their gracious God.

Yet I think that *there is some measure of grace mingled with this fear.* Let me read you this passage straight on: "Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." She did not say that till God had visited her. "The Lord hath comforted his people." He has brought them out of a yet lower depth that they were in, and they have been lifted up so high as now to want his presence, and to sigh for it. Beloved brother, you who are so deep down in the dungeon, I feel glad that you want to get out of it. There is, in your soul, a longing after God, is there not? There is a panting and a crying after peace with God, is there not? You are not satisfied as long as you even think that God has forsaken you, are you? Ah, then! this is the work of his Holy Spirit in your soul, making you long after the living God, so that there is some sign of grace even in that discontented moan of yours, for it proves that you cannot bear that God should forsake you. Now, if you belonged to the world, it would be nothing to you if the Lord did forsake you. If there were no grace in you, you would not care whether God forgot you or not; indeed, you might almost wish that he would forget you, and not visit you in his wrath. There is, therefore, some trace of his hand in your spirit, even now that you say, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

Besides, although the text is a word of complaint, it has also in it a word of faith: "*my* Lord." Did you notice that? Zion calls

Jehovah hers though she dreams that he has forsaken her. I do love to see you keep the grip of your faith even when it seems to be illogical,—even if you fancy that the Lord hath forgotten and forsaken you. Though you fear that it is so, yet still say, "my Lord," hold on to this assurance with a death-grip. If you cannot hold on with both hands, hold on with one; and if sometimes you can hold with neither hand, hold on with your teeth. Let Job's resolve be yours: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. . . . Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God;"—"and every scattered grain of this my dust shall still confide in God." Oh, for the faith that laughs at impossibilities, that leaps with joy between the very jaws of death itself, and sings in the very centre of the fire! Such a faith as that, whatever weakness there way be about it, brings glory to God. So I treasure up that little word "my." There are only two letters in it, but they are fraught with untold hope to the man who can use them as Zion does here, "my Lord."

So much for the fear which the text is intended to meet.

II. Now I come, as God shall help me, to speak concerning THE COMFORT BESTOWED: "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

This assurance is the Lord's answer to Zion's lament, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me;" so take it from God's own mouth, and never doubt it. God's remembrance of his people as a whole, and of each individual in particular, has been secured by him beyond all question. "That we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," he has said to each of us, "'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,' I have done it, and I have done that which will render it utterly impossible that I should ever forget one of my people. I the Lord have committed myself to something which will henceforth render it absolutely certain that I never can forget my own, for 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.'"

These words seem to say to us that God has already secured, beyond any possible hazard, his tender memory towards all his own. He has done this in such a way that forgetfulness can never occur at any moment whatsoever. The memorial is not set up in heaven, for then you might conceive that God could descend, and leave that memorial. It is not set up in any great public place in the universe, nor is it engraven in a signet ring upon God's finger, for that might be taken off. It is not written upon the Almighty's skirts,—to speak after the manner of men,—for he might disrobe himself for conflict; but he has put the token of his love where it cannot be laid aside,—on the palms of his hands. A man cannot leave his hands at home. If he has put something, by way of memorial, upon the walls of his house or the gates of his home, he may go away, and forget it. Or if, as I have said, he shall write the memorial upon some precious diamond, or topaz, or other jewels which he wears, yet he might lay them on one side. But God says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," so that the

memorial is constantly with him; yea, it is in God himself that the memorial of his people is fixed.

I suppose the allusion is to an Oriental custom, possibly not very common, but still common enough to have survived to this day. Mr. John Anderson, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Helensburgh, who was a very dear friend of mine, told me that, on one or two occasions, he had seen, in the East, men who had the portraits of their friends, and others who had the initials of their friends, in the palms of their hands. I said to him, "But I suppose that, in time, they would wash off or wear out." "No," he said, "they were tattooed too deeply in to be removed, so that, whenever they opened their hand, there were the familiar initials, or some resemblance to the features of the beloved one, to keep him ever in remembrance." And the Lord here adopts that ancient custom, and says, "I cannot forget thee; it is impossible for me to do so, for I have engraven thee where the memorial can never be apart from myself. 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.'"

Now, what is it, dear friends, that makes it so certain that God cannot forget his people? Well, first, *God remembers his eternal love to his people*, and his remembrance of them is constant because of that love. He says to each believing soul, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." The people of God were loved by him long before the world was created; he has loved them too long ever to forget them. "I have loved too long," said one man, "to be turned aside by the blandishment of another." We cannot imagine anything that could separate us from that dear heart to which our heart is knit even with a human love; while both of us shall live, the twain are indeed one. And God has loved us more than husbands love their wives, or fathers love their children, or brothers love their brothers. His love is like a great ocean of which all human love is but a drop of spray; and he has loved us so long, so well, so deeply, so unreservedly, that he cannot forget us. Even when any one of his people wanders from him, and grieves his heart, he says, "Yes, but I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and I will not cast thee off. Though all that thou now art might tend to wean me from thee, yet mine is not the love of yesterday, it is not a passion like that which flames within some men for a brief space, and then quickly goes out in darkness." It is God's eternal love that makes him keep us in memory. He has graven us, from all eternity, upon the palms of his hands, and therefore he cannot forget us.

Next, *God's suffering love secures his memory of us.* Well did we sing, just now,—

> "The palms of my hands whilst I look on I see
> The wounds I received when suffering for thee."

Oh, how deeply the cruel gravers cut our names in Christ's dear hands! Those nails that fastened him to the cross were the graving tools, and he leaned hard while the iron pierced through flesh, and nerve, and vein. Yet the graving of which our text speaks is more

than that, for the Lord himself says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." The sufferings of Christ for us were such that never, by any possibility, can he forget us. Since he has died for us, he will never cast us away. By his death, on Calvary's cross, Christ ensured that all those for whom he died shall live with him in his kingdom as surely as he himself lives. He paid not in vain such a tremendous price; neither shall he lose any part of that which he has thus purchased for himself. What a blessed memorial, then, is not only God's eternal love, but Christ's suffering love!

Yet again, by the expression, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," God seems to say, "*I have done so much for you that I can never forget you.*" God has actively wrought for his people in many ways, but I will only now mention what his Spirit has wrought in you; what a theme that is! And, from the fact that the Spirit of God has wrought so much in us, we derive the satisfaction that he will never forget us. A man does not forget the work of his own hands, especially if it is something very choice. I remember that, in the siege of Paris, a great artist hid away a grand picture which was then but partly finished. Did he forget to go to Paris when it had its liberty, and to seek out his painting? Assuredly not; he remembered the work of his own hands, and back he went to draw it out, and put the finishing touches to it. So, God has done too much for us for him ever to lose us. Has he not created us anew in Christ Jesus, and given his Spirit to dwell within us? Then, surely, he will never turn away from work so costly, so divine; but he will complete it to his own praise and glory.

But, once more, when a memorial is engraven on a man's hand, *then it is connected with the man's life.* While he lives, that memorial is a part of his life. So is it with God. He has linked his people with his life. Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also." The union between your incarnate God and yourself is a thing which is so complete that your life is intertwisted with his life. Christ and you have become one fabric. To tear you away would be to destroy him. "Your life is hid with Christ in God;" and until Christ himself shall die, his people shall not die. Oh, think of this wondrous mystery! The ever-blessed Son of God is bound up in the bundle of life with all his people.

This I take to be the meaning of the Lord's words, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." I cannot go deeper into this blessed subject; but I pray God to take you deeper, for there is a great depth here.

III. Now, beloved, I turn to the third head of my discourse, upon which I will be very brief. We have had a fear expressed, and a comfort bestowed; now, here is AN INSPECTION INVITED. "Behold," says Jehovah, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

Come, then. "Behold." Look for yourselves. There is God the Father; did you say that he had forsaken you? But how can that be? Behold, and see. He is your Father if you are trusting in

his Son, Jesus Christ. Do you forget, do you forsake your own children? Tell me. You had a boy, who well-nigh broke your heart. He went away, and you were sadly glad when he went, for he had so grieved you that you thought it better that he should be out of sight. But have you forgotten him? Suppose he came back to-night. 'Tis years now since he left you without your blessing. Mother, you have never heard from him. Father, no tidings of your boy ever come to you. But if, when you went home to-night, there should be a big fellow sitting by the fireside,—not your boy any longer, and yet your own long-lost son,—after the first surprise, and after you had seen that it was your son, tell me, mother, would you turn him out of doors for all his ingratitude to you? Father, what would you do, first of all? I know what I should do if it were my case; I should fondly kiss that cheek, and bless God that I had lived to see my son again, whatever he might have been, and however much he might have grieved me. If you, then, being evil, neither forget nor forsake your children, will your Father who is in heaven forget you? Behold, and see if it is possible. God the everlasting Father does so intensely love, so infinitely love his own children, that it must never be dreamt for a moment that it is possible for him to forget any one of them.

Come now, and look again. Behold, by faith, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity in Unity, Jesus, the Lamb of God. Look at him on the cross; oh, what griefs he there bore for his people! Take down the blessed body—(you can scarcely bear to handle it), and help to wrap it in its linen cloths, and lay it in the tomb. Why did he suffer thus? Why did he die? For his own loved ones; then, can he ever forget them? Is it possible? After all that agony, can Jesus forget? Oh, no! Our children may forget us; but the mother remembers how she suffered for the child, and she loves it for the very pangs she endured in its birth. She knows the struggles of her widowhood to find bread for the child,—how she starved herself to satisfy its hunger. Oh, what agony and self-denial some parents have suffered for their children; but these make them all the dearer, and render it all the more impossible that they should ever forget them. Well, then, remembering all this, look into the face of your Saviour, who died for you, and will you dare to say that he can possibly forget you? It cannot be; he has graven you upon the palms of his hands, and he will never forget or forsake you.

Then think, also, of that dear and blessed Spirit of God, who has come into your heart, and striven with you when you resisted him, and at last won the day; and, since then, has helped your infirmities, checked your hastiness, aroused you from your sloth, and been everything to you that he could be; and do you think that, after all this, he will ever forget or forsake you? Oh, if he had meant to cast you away, he has had many opportunities when he might have done so. Surely, he would never have come to dwell in such a hovel as your fallen nature is if he had not intended to transform it, and make it into a pure alabaster palace wherein the living God might dwell. "Behold," says the Lord. That is, look

into this great truth; look deeply into it, and then say to yourself, "My fears of being forgotten or forsaken are all gone, for I am graven upon the palms of his hands."

IV. So I close by referring very briefly to the last point, which is this, A RETURN SUGGESTED.

I want, brothers and sisters, to speak in a very homely and familiar way to each one of you; and, at the same time, to be speaking to myself as well as to you.

Does Christ remember us as I have tried to prove that he does? *Then, let us remember him.* To that end he ordained that blessed supper to which many of us are coming presently,—the eating of the bread, and the drinking of the cup in memory of him. "This do ye in remembrance of me." Now try to forget everything but your Lord and Saviour. Pass an act of oblivion on all your cares, and troubles, and sorrows; and only look at him as though, like a mysterious stranger, he stood at the pew door, and leaned over you, and you seemed to feel his shadow falling upon you. Now think of him, for he is very near you, and you are very near to him.

And, brethren, let us not only remember him at his table, but *let us remember him constantly.* Let us, as it were, carry his name upon the palms of our hands; let us ask God to help us always to think of Jesus,—never to forget him, but to have the memory of him intertwisted with our very breathing, with the pulsing of our blood, till our whole nature, like a bell, shall ring out but one note, and that shall be love to Jesus, and our heart shall be like Anacreon's harp, of which he said that he wished to sing of the deeds of Cadmus, but his heart and his harp resounded love alone. Oh, for the love of Christ to be the one all-engrossing, all-absorbing theme of our entire being, till we truly say to Christ, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

And, brothers, *let us remember Christ practically.* We ought so to wear Christ on our hands that whatever we touch should be thereby Christianized. I have heard of the "christening" of babies, that is an idle superstition, and a perversion of Christ's ordinance of believers' baptism; but I believe in the Christ-ening of everything a Christian touches. Make it all Christlike by doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, as the apostle Paul says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Thus engrave his name upon the palms of your hands.

And, so brethren, *let the name of Christ, and your memory of it, become vital to you.* Not with a broad phylactery, not with the borders of your garments enlarged, not with outward signs and tokens of which some think a good deal too much in these days,—for true religion consists not in a dress of this cut or that, nor does it lie in boasting, like Pharisees, what we are, sounding our own praise at the corners of the streets that all may know it and observe;—but true religion lies in this, that we cannot live without Christ, that our ordinary life becomes uplifted by the Christ who dwells within us, till every meal is a sacrament, every garment is a vestment, every place is an altar, and the whole world a temple in

which we are kings and priests because God has made us so. Unto this may we each of us come, and come now!

If any of you have not yet believed in Jesus, oh, how I wish you would! As I am going away for a while, I shall not be able to speak personally to you for some time to come; but I hope that those, whom my voice has failed to influence, may be reached by some other servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall occupy this pulpit to speak to you in my absence. Oh, that you all knew my Lord! There is none like him. His bonds are freedom; his service is rest; to die for him, is life; to live for him, is heaven. God bring you to him. and fasten you to him for ever! **Amen, and Amen.**

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN XIV. 1—21.

We have often read this chapter, both in our private meditations, and at our public worship; but we cannot read it too often. It is sweet as honey and the honeycomb. It contains the very quintessence of consolation. Every word in the chapter is rich, and full of meaning. Perhaps they understand it best who cannot read it quickly, but are obliged to spell over every word of it, and so are like those who feast upon marrow and fatness.

Verse 1. *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

That is the cure for heart-trouble, and all other trouble, too,—believing in God, and believing in his Son, Jesus Christ. Faith is the double cure of trouble, for it delivers us altogether from the trouble, and, at the same time, it helps us to find sweetness in it as long as we have to endure it.

Notice that our Saviour says, "Let not your heart be troubled." If your heart can be preserved from trouble, you will not be greatly tried by it. Trouble is in your house, perhaps; but, if so, let it not get into your heart. The waves beat all round your vessel, but let not the vessel itself leak, and take in the water: "Let not your heart be troubled."

2. *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

This was very largely the cause of their trouble; they were full of sorrow because their Lord and Master was going away from them; yet he was going for their good. It was with a set purpose that he was leaving them, and the same reason still keeps him away from us. We are not to mourn for him as we might for one slain in battle, who would never come back to us. He has gone for a little while to another country, to the great Father's house, upon a most gracious and necessary errand: "I go to prepare a place for you." The Spirit of God is down here to prepare us for the place; the Son of God is up yonder to prepare the place for us.

3. *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Do not tell us about a purgatory for Christ's people, a limbo in which they are to lie awhile to be prepared to share his glory. No, he will come at the right time, and take them to be where he is, and they shall have the very place that Jesus has: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Do you want a better rest than that after all your work and warfare here below? Does not this prospect cheer you while you are journeying down the hill of life? It is better on before.

4. *And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*

"Ye know that I am going to the Father, and ye know that I am myself the way to the Father; I am going whence I came."

5, 6. *Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life:*

"I am all that you want on your way to heaven, the truth that will make heaven for you, and the life which you will enjoy with me for ever in heaven. I give you all that while you are yet here below."

6. *No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

There is no getting to God except through Christ. Those who say that we can go to heaven without a Mediator know not what they say, or say what they know to be false. There can be no acceptable approach to the Father except by Jesus Christ the Son.

7. *If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also:*

For Christ is also "the mighty God, the everlasting Father." All the character of God is seen in the Christ of God, and he who truly comes to Christ has really come to the Father.

7. *And from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.*

I hope that this may be said of many of us, that we do truly know God; and, since we have seen Christ by faith, we have seen the Father also.

8. *Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*

What a comfort these questions and blunders of Thomas and Philip ought to be to us, for it is clear that we are not the only dolts in Christ's school; and if he could bear with them, he can bear with us also. Like them, how little do we retain of that which he teaches us! We are taught much, but we learn little, for we are such poor scholars. Our memory holds but little, and our understanding still less of what we have been taught, and we are all too apt to want something that we can see, just as Philip said, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

9—11. *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

Note how the Master continued to urge his disciples to believe. Again and again he returned to that vital point: "Believest thou?" "Believe me . . . . : believe me." This he did because there is no relief from heart-trouble but by believing the everlasting truth of God, and especially by believing him who is "the truth." The believer alone has true peace of heart; the unbeliever is tossed to and fro on the billows of the great ocean of doubt; how can he rest? There is nothing for him to rest upon. Happily, Christ is still saying, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" and they are truly wise who accept his gracious invitation.

12. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

When Christ had gone back to the Father, he opened all heaven's treasures for his people; he bestowed the Spirit of all grace, and so his servants were helped to do even greater works than he himself did while he was upon the earth. We cannot add anything to his atonement; that

work must for ever stand as complete and unique; but there are other forms of service, in which he engaged in his earthly ministry, in which his servants have gone far beyond him. The Lord Jesus Christ never preached a sermon after which three thousand were converted and baptized in one day; to a large extent he kept his personal ministry within the bounds of Palestine; but, after his resurrection, when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, then, in the power of the Spirit, greater works than his were wrought the wide world over.

13, 14. *And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

Is that promise true to every man? Certainly not. It was made by Christ to his own disciples, and not to all of them absolutely; but only to them as they believe in him, as they are filled with his Spirit, and as they keep his commandments. There are some of God's children who have little power with him in prayer,—some who walk so disorderly that, since they do not listen to God's words, he will not listen to theirs. Yet he will give them necessaries, as you give even to your naughty and disobedient children; but he will not give them the luxury of prevailing prayer, and that full fellowship with him which comes through abiding in him. Such luxuries he saves for his obedient children, who are filled with his Spirit. Even under the old dispensation, David wrote, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart;" and in a very special sense, under the new dispensation, that spirituality of mind, which enables us to delight in God, is a necessary antecedent to our obtaining the desires of our heart in the high and spiritual sphere of prayer.

15—17. *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him:*

The world is carnal, it is unspiritual; therefore, it is unable to see or to know the Spirit of God. A man without a spiritual nature cannot recognize the Holy Spirit; he must be born again before he can do so. You who are only soul and body need to receive that third and loftier principle—the spirit which is wrought in us by the Spirit of God. Until you have it, this verse applies to you: "The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him."

17. *But ye know him;*

Christ's own disciples know him.

17—19. *For he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.*

Oh, what a rich promise! How, then, can Christ's people ever perish? Until Christ himself perishes, no child of his can ever be lost.

20. *At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*

Three wondrous mysteries of union,—Christ in the Father, the Church in Christ, and Christ in his Church.

21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

May we be such lovers of Christ that he may love us, and manifest himself unto us, for his name's sake! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 6TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Lord's-day Evening, early in the year 1858.

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."—1 Corinthians ii. 2.

CORINTH was situated in the midst of a people who admired eloquence and wisdom. This Epistle was written in the age of orators and philosophers. The apostle Paul was a man of profound learning; he had been educated at the feet of Gamaliel in all the wisdom of the East. We are quite sure he was a man of a very capacious mind; for, although his writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit chose as his instrument a man evidently possessing the capacity for strong and vigorous thought and argument; and as for his oratorical powers, I believe that, if he had chosen to cultivate them, they would have been of the very first order, for we have in some of his Epistles eloquence more sublime than ever fell from the lips of Cicero or Demosthenes.

The temptation would exist, in the mind of any ordinary man entering into such a city as Corinth, to say within himself, "I will endeavour to excel in all the graces of oratory; I have a blessed gospel to preach that is worthy of the highest talents that ever can be consecrated to it." "I am," Paul might have said to himself, "largely gifted in the matter of eloquence, I must now endeavour carefully to polish my periods, and so to fashion my address as to excel all the orators who now attract the Corinthians to listen to them. This I may do very laudably, for I will still keep in view my intention of preaching Jesus Christ; and I will preach Jesus Christ with such a flow of noble language that I shall be able to win my audience to consider the subject."

But the apostle resolved to do no such thing. "No," said he, "before I enter the gates of Corinth, this is my firm determination; if any good is to be done there, if any are led to believe in Christ the Messiah, their belief shall be the result of hearing the gospel, and not of my eloquence. It shall never be said, 'Oh! no wonder

that Christianity spreads, see what an able advocate it has; ' but it shall be said, ' How mighty must be the grace of God which has convinced these persons by such simple preaching, and brought them to know the Lord Jesus Christ by such humble instrumentality as that of the apostle Paul!' " He resolved to put a curb upon his fiery tongue, he determined that he would be slow in speech in the midst of them; and, instead of magnifying himself, he would magnify his office, and magnify the grace of God by denying himself the full use of those powers, which, had they been dedicated to God,—as indeed they were,—but had they been fully employed, as some would have used them, might have achieved for him the reputation of being the most eloquent preacher upon the face of the earth.

Again, he might have said, "These philosophers are very wise men; if I would be a match for them, I must be very wise, too. These Corinthians are a very noble race of people; they have been for a long time under the tuition of these talented men. I must speak as they speak, in enigmas and with many sophisms; I must always be propounding some dark problem. I need not live in the tub of Diogenes; but if I take his lantern, I may do something with it; I must try and borrow some of his wisdom. I have a profound philosophy to preach to these clever people; and if I liked to preach that philosophy, I should dash in pieces all their theories concerning mental and moral science. I have found out a wondrous secret, and I might stand in the midst of the market-place, and cry, ' Eureka, Eureka,' ' I have found it,' but I do not care to build my gospel upon the foundation of human wisdom. No, if any are brought to believe in Christ, it shall be from the simple unadorned gospel, plainly preached in unpolished language. The faith of my hearers, if they are converted to God, shall not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Can you not see, dear friends, that the apostle had very good reasons for coming to this determination? When a man says that he is determined to do a certain thing, it looks as if he knew that it was a difficult thing to do. So, methinks it must have been a hard thing for the apostle to determine to keep to this one subject, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." I am sure that nine-tenths of the ministers of this age could not have done it. Fancy Paul going through the streets of Corinth, and hearing a philosopher explain the current theory of creation. He is telling the people something about the world springing out of certain things that previously existed, and the apostle Paul thinks, "I could easily correct that man's mistakes; I could tell him that the Lord created all things in six days, and rested on the seventh, and show him in the Book of Genesis the inspired account of the creation." "But, no," he says to himself, "I have a more important message than that to deliver." Still, he must have felt as if he would have liked to set him right; for, you know, when you hear a man uttering a gross falsehood, you feel as if you would like to go in, and do battle with him. But instead of that, the apostle just thinks, "It is not my business to set the people right about their theory of the creation of the world.

All that I have to do is to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Besides, in Corinth, there was now and then sure to be a political struggle, and I have no doubt that the apostle Paul felt for his people, the Jews, and he would have liked to see all his Jewish kindred have the privilege of citizenship. Sometimes the Corinthians would hold a public meeting, in which they would support the opinion that the Jews ought not to have citizenship in Corinth; might not the apostle have made a speech at such a gathering? If he had been asked to do so, he would have said, "I know nothing about such matters; all I know is Jesus Christ, and him crucified." They had political lectures, no doubt, in Corinth; and one man delivered a lecture upon this subject, and another upon that; in fact, all kinds of wonderful themes taken from the ancient poets were descanted upon by different men. Did not the apostle Paul take one of the lectures? Did he not say, "I may throw a little gospel into it, and so do some good"? No, he said, "I come here as Christ's minister, and I will never be anything else but Christ's minister; I will never address the Corinthians in any other character than that of Christ's ambassador. For one thing only have I determined to know, and that is, Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Would to God that all the ministers of this age had determined to do the same!

Do you not sometimes find a minister who takes a prominent part in an election, who thinks it his business to stand forth on the political platform of the nation; and did it ever strike you that he was out of his place, that it was his business to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ, and him crucified? Do we not see, at every corner of our streets, a lecture advertised to be delivered on this and that and the other subject, by this minister and that, who leave their pulpits in order that they may be enabled to deliver lectures upon all kinds of subjects? "No," Paul would have said, "if I cannot spread the gospel of Christ legitimately, by preaching it openly, I will not do it by taking an absurd title for my sermon; for the gospel shall stand or fall on its own merits, and with no enticing words of man's wisdom will I preach it." Let anyone say to me, "Come and give your able advocacy for this or that reform," and my answer would be, "I do not know anything about that subject, for I have determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." As Albert Barnes very well says, "This should be the resolution of every minister of the gospel. This is his business;—not to be a politician; not to engage in the strifes and controversies of men; not to be merely a good farmer, or scholar; not to mingle with his people in festive circles and enjoyments; not to be a man of taste and philosophy, and distinguished mainly for refinement of manners; not to be a profound philosopher or metaphysician, but to make Christ crucified the grand object of his attention, and to seek always and everywhere to make him known. He is not to be ashamed anywhere of the humbling doctrine that Christ was crucified. In this, he is to glory. Though the world may ridicule, though philosophers may sneer, though the rich and the gay may

deride it, yet this is to be the grand object of interest to him; and at no time, and in no society, is he to be ashamed of it. It matters not what are the amusements of society around him; what fields of science, or gain, or ambition, are open before him; the minister of Christ is to know Christ and him crucified alone. If he cultivates science, it is to be that he may the more successfully explain and vindicate the gospel. If he becomes in any manner familiar with the works of art and of taste, it is that he may more successfully show to those who cultivate them the superior beauty and excellence of the cross. If he studies the plans and the employments of men, it is that he may more successfully meet them in those plans, and more successfully speak to them of the great plan of redemption. The preaching of the cross is the only kind of preaching that will be attended with success. That which has in it much respecting the Divine mission, the dignity, the works, the doctrines, the person, and the atonement of Christ, will be successful. So it was in the time of the apostles; so it was in the Reformation; so it was in the Moravian missions; so it has been in all revivals of religion. There is a power about that kind of preaching which philosophy and human reason have not. 'Christ is God's great ordinance' for the salvation of the world; and we meet the crimes and alleviate the woes of the world just in proportion as we hold the cross up as appointed to overcome the one, and to pour the balm of consolation into the other."

Would that all ministers would keep this in mind, that they should do nothing outside the office of the ministry, that to be once a minister is to be a minister for ever, and never to be a politician, never to be a lecturer; that to be once a preacher is to be a preacher of Christ's holy gospel until Christ takes us to himself to begin to sing the new song before the throne.

Now, brethren and sisters, I have discharged my duty in saying these things. If they apply to any ministers whom you admire, I cannot help it. There is the text, and what do we learn from it but this, that the apostle Paul determined to do everything as a minister of Christ? And, my dear brethren and sisters, it is your duty to do this as hearers. As Christians, it is your duty and privilege to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

I. And first, with regard to THE DOCTRINES WHICH YOU BELIEVE, I beseech you, do not know anything except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

You are told by one person that such-and-such a system of theology is based upon the soundest principles of reason. You are told by another that the old doctrines which you have believed are not consistent with these advanced times. You will now and then be met by smart young gentlemen who will tell you that, to be what is called a Calvinist, is to be a long way behind this progressive age; "for you know," they say, "that intellectual preachers are rising up, and that it would be well if you would become a little more intellectual in the matter of preaching and hearing." When such a remark as that is made to any one of you, I beseech you to give this answer, "I know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him cruci-

fied. If you can tell me more about Christ than I know, I will thank you; if you can instruct me as to how I may become more like Christ, how I may live nearer in fellowship with him, how my faith in him may become stronger, and my belief in his holy gospel may become more firm, then I will thank you; but if you have nothing to tell me except some intellectual lore which you have with great pains accumulated, I will tell you that, although it may be a very good thing for you to preach, and for others who are intellectual to hear, I do not belong to your class, nor do I wish to belong to it; I belong to that sect everywhere spoken against, who after the way that men call heresy worship the Lord God of their fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets. I belong to a race of people who believe that it is not the pride of intellect, nor the pomp of knowledge that can ever teach men spiritual things. I belong to those who think that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God hath ordained strength, and I do not believe that out of your mouth God has ordained any strength at all. I belong to the men who like to sit, with Mary, at the feet of Jesus, and to receive just what Christ said, as Christ said it, and because Christ said it. I want no truth but what he says is truth, and no other ground for believing it but that he says it, and no better proof that it is true than that I feel and know it to be true as applied to my own heart."

Now, dear friend, if you can do that, I will trust you anywhere,—even amongst the wisest heretics of the age. You may go where false doctrines are rife, but you will never catch the plague of heresy while you have this golden preservative of truth, and can say, "I know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." As for myself, I can truly say, that Jesus Christ, and him crucified, is the sum of all knowledge to me; he is the highest intellectualism; he is the grandest philosophy to which my mind can attain; he is the pinnacle that rises loftier than my highest aspirations; and deeper than this great truth I wish never to fathom. Jesus Christ and him crucified is the sum total of all I want to know, and of all the doctrines which I profess and preach.

II. Next, it must be just the same IN YOUR EXPERIENCE. Brethren, I beseech you, in your experience, know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

You may go out to-morrow, not merely into the outside world, but into the church, the nominal church, and you will meet with a class of persons who take you by the ear, and who invite you into their houses, and the moment you are there, they begin to talk to you about the doctrines of the gospel. They say nothing about Christ Jesus; but they begin at once to talk of the eternal decrees of God, of election, and of the high mysteries of the covenant of grace. While they are talking to you, you say in your hearts, "What they are saying is true, but there is one lamentable defect in it all; their teaching is truth apart from Christ." Conscience whispers, "The election that I believe is election in Christ. These men do not talk anything about that, but only of election. The redemption that I believe always has a very special reference to

the cross of Christ. These men do not mention Christ; they talk of redemption as a commercial transaction, and say nothing about Jesus. With regard to final perseverance, I believe all that these men say; but I have been taught that the saints only persevere in consequence of their relation to Christ, and these men say nothing about that." This minister, they say, is not sound, and that other minister is not sound; and let me tell you that, if you get amongst this class of persons, you will learn to rue the day that ever you looked them in the face. If you must come into contact with them, I beseech you to say to them, "I love all the truths that you hold, but my love of them can never overpower and supersede my love to Jesus Christ, and him crucified; and I tell you plainly, while I could not sit to hear erroneous doctrine, I could just as soon do that as sit to hear the truthful doctrine apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. I could not go to a place where I saw a man, dressed in gorgeous robes, who pretended to be Christ, and was not; and, on the other hand, I could not go to a place where I saw Christ's real robes, but the Master himself was absent; for what I want is, not his robe, not his dress, I want the Master himself; and if you preach to me dry doctrine without Jesus Christ, I tell you it will not suit my experience; for my experience is just this, that while I know my election, I never can know it except I know my union with the Lamb. I tell you plainly that I know I am redeemed, but I cannot bear to think of redemption without thinking of the Saviour who redeemed me. It is my boast that I shall to the end endure, but I know—each hour makes me know—that my endurance depends upon my standing in Christ, and I must have that truth preached in connection with the cross of Christ." Oh! have nought to do with these people, unless it is to set them right; for you will find that they are full of the gall of bitterness, the poison of asps is under their tongue; instead of giving you things whereon your soul can feed, they will make you full of all manner of bitterness, and malice, and evil speaking against those who truly love the Lord Jesus, but who differ from them in some slight matter.

You may meet with another class of persons who will take you by the other ear, and say to you, "We, too, love Christ's doctrines, but we believe that our friends on the other side of the road are wrong. They do not preach enough experience;" and you say, "Well, I think I have got amongst the people who will suit me now;" and you hear the minister insisting that the most precious experience in the world is to know your own corruption, to feel the evil of the human heart, to have that filthy dunghill turned over and over in all its reeking noisomeness, and exposed before the sun; and after hearing the sermon, which is full of pretended humility, you rise from your seats more proud than you ever were in your lives, determined now that you will begin to glory in that very thing which you once counted as dross. The things which you were ashamed once to speak of, you now think should be your boast. That deep experience which was your disgrace shall now become the crown of your rejoicing. You speak to the dear brothers and

sisters who imbibe this view, and they tell you to seek first, not the kingdom of God and his righteousness, but the hidden things of the prison, the discovery of the unrighteousness and unholiness of the soul. O my dear friends, if you wish to have your lives made miserable, if you want to be led back to the bondage of Egypt, if you want to have Pharaoh's rope put round your necks once again, take their motto for your motto; but if you wish to live as I believe Christ would have you live, I would entreat you to say, "No, it does me good sometimes to hear of the evil heart, but I have made a determination to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, and you do not tell me anything about him." These men preach one Sunday upon the leper; but do they preach, the next Sunday, upon the leper healed? These men tell all about the filthy state of the human heart, but they say little or nothing about that river that is to cleanse and purify it. They say much about the disease, but not so much about the Physician; and if you attend their ministry very long, you will be obliged to say, "I shall get into such a doleful condition, that I shall be tempted to imitate Judas, and go out, and hang myself. So, good morning to you, for I have determined to know nothing in my experience but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

I would be very earnest in trying to warn you about this matter, for there is a growing tendency, amongst a certain order of professing Christians, to set up something in experience except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Tell me that your experience is all concerned with the Lord Jesus Christ, and I will rejoice in it; the more of Christ there is in it, the more precious it is. Tell me that your experience is full of the knowledge of your own corruptions, and I answer, "If there is not in it a mixture also of the knowledge of Christ, and unless the knowledge of Christ predominates to a large degree, your experience is wood, hay, and stubble, and must be consumed, and you must suffer loss."

By the way, let me tell you a little story about Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I am a great lover of John Bunyan, but I do not believe him infallible; and the other day I met with a story about him which I think a very good one. There was a young man, in Edinburgh, who wished to be a missionary. He was a wise young man; so he thought, "If I am to be a missionary, there is no need for me to transport myself far away from home; I may as well be a missionary in Edinburgh." There's a hint to some of you ladies, who give away tracts in your district, and never give your servant Mary one. Well, this young man started, and determined to speak to the first person he met. He met one of those old fishwives; those of us who have seen them can never forget them, they are extraordinary women indeed. So, stepping up to her, he said, "Here you are, coming along with your burden on your back; let me ask you if you have got another burden, a spiritual burden." "What!" she asked; "do you mean that burden in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress?* Because, if you do, young man, I got rid of that many years ago, probably before you were born. But I went a better way to work than the pilgrim did. The evangelist that John Bunyan talks about was one of your parsons that do not preach the gospel; for he said, 'Keep

that light in thine eye, and run to the wicket-gate.' Why, man alive! that was not the place for him to run to. He should have said, 'Do you see that cross? Run there at once!' But, instead of that, he sent the poor pilgrim to the wicket-gate first; and much good he got by going there! He got tumbling into the slough, and was like to have been killed by it." "But did not you," the young man asked, "go through any Slough of Despond?" "Yes, I did; but I found it a great deal easier going through with my burden off than with it on my back." The old woman was quite right. John Bunyan put the getting rid of the burden too far off from the commencement of the pilgrimage. If he meant to show what usually happens, he was right; but if he meant to show what ought to have happened, he was wrong. We must not say to the sinner, "Now, sinner, if thou wilt be saved, go to the baptismal pool; go to the wicket-gate; go to the church; do this or that." No, the cross should be right in front of the wicket-gate; and we should say to the sinner, "Throw thyself down there, and thou art safe; but thou are not safe till thou canst cast off thy burden, and lie at the foot of the cross, and find peace in Jesus."

III. Let me conclude by saying, brethren and sisters, determine, from this hour, that IN YOUR FAITH you will know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

I am perfectly certain that I have not a grain of my own merit to trust in, and not so much as an atom of creature strength to rely upon; but I find myself often, during the seven days of the week, relying upon merit of my own that does not exist, and depending upon strength of my own which I at the same time confess has no existence at all. You and I often call the Pope antichrist; but do we not ourselves often play the antichrist, too? The Pope sets himself up as the head of the Church; but do not we go further by setting ourselves up sometimes to be our own saviours? We do not say so, except in a sort of still small voice, like the mutterings of the old wizards. It is not a loud, out-spoken lie, because we should know then how to answer it; "but now," whispers the devil, "how well you did that!" and then we begin to rely upon our works, and Satan says, "You prayed so well yesterday, you will never be cold in your prayers again; and you will be so strong in faith that you will never doubt your God again." It is the old golden calf that is set up once more; for, although it was ground to powder, it seems to have the art of coming together again. After we have been told, ten times over, that we cannot have any merit of our own, we begin to act as if we had; and the man who tells you, in his doctrine, that all his fresh springs are in Christ, yet thinks and acts just as if he had fresh springs of his own. He mourns as if all his dependence were upon himself, and groans as if his salvation depended upon his own merits. We often get talking, in our own souls, as if we did not believe the gospel at all, but were hoping to be saved by our own works, and our own creature performances. Oh, for a stronger determination to know nothing henceforth but Jesus Christ, and him crucified! I would to God that I could make that resolution myself, and that you would all make it with me. I heard once of a countryman, who was preaching, one day, and he preached very

nicely the first half of his sermon, but towards the end he entirely broke down, and his brother said to him, "Tom, I can tell you why you did not preach well at the end of your sermon. It was because you got on so nicely at first that the devil whispered, 'Well done, Tom, you are getting on very well;' and as soon as the devil said that, you thought 'Tom is a very fine fellow,' and then the Lord left you." Happy would it have been for Tom if he could have determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, and not to have known Tom at all. That is what I desire to know myself; for if I know nothing but the power which comes from on high, I never can be less powerful at one time than at another, and I can glory in my infirmity because it makes room for Christ's power to rest upon me.

> "I glory in infirmity,
> That Christ's own power may rest on me:
> When I am weak, then am I strong,
> Grace is my shield, and Christ my song."

It would be a good resolution for you, brethren, and for myself, to determine to know nothing about ourselves, and nothing about our own doings. Now, friend John, begin to think nothing about yourself, and to know nothing but Jesus Christ. Let John go where he likes, and be you relying not upon John's strength, but upon Christ's. And you, Peter, know nothing about Peter at all, and do not boast, "Though all men should deny thee, yet will I never deny thee;" but know that Peter's Lord Jesus is living inside Peter, and then you may go on comfortably enough.

Determine, Christian, that, by the grace of God, it shall be your endeavour to keep your eye single, to keep your faith fixed alone on the Lord Jesus, without any addition of your own works, or your own strength; and determining that, you may go on your way rejoicing, singing of the cross of Christ as your boast, your glory, and your all. We are now coming to the table of our Master, and I hope that this will be our determination there, to know nothing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified; and may the Lord give us his blessing! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM XXII.

This Psalm is headed, "To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar,"—or, as the margin renders it, "the hind of the morning,"—"A Psalm of David." It begins in the very depths of the Master's sorrow, when this great and bitter cry escaped his lips,—

Verse 1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Every word is emphatic: "*My* God, my *God*, why hast *thou* forsaken me?" "All others may forsake me, and I need not be greatly troubled at their absence; but 'why hast *thou* forsaken me?'" "'Why hast thou *forsaken* me?' I understand why thou dost smite me, for I am the Shepherd predestined to be smitten for the flock, but 'why hast thou *forsaken* me?'"

"Why hast thou forsaken *me?*—thine only-begotten, thy well-beloved Son,—'why hast thou forsaken *me?*'"

1. *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

"Why have I no inflowings of thy love,—no enjoyment of thy presence,—no whispers from thy heart? I am left alone,—left utterly,—left on the cross,—left in my direst need." God's adopted children do not usually talk like this; such a lament as this has not often come even from the martyrs for the faith, for, as a rule, they have had God with them in their hour of deepest agony; but here was One, who was far greater than they, who yet had to endure suffering from which they were exempted;—the only perfect One was forsaken by God. You know that it was because he stood in our stead that the Saviour had this pre-eminence in suffering and sorrow.

2. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

Think of what a weight that unanswered prayer was upon the soul of the Well-beloved. Have you ever felt such a burden as that? Then, you are not alone in that experience, for he who is infinitely better than you can ever be had to think over his day prayers and his night prayers which, for a while, were not answered.

3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Follow the example of your Lord, poor troubled soul. Find no fault with thy God, even though he should forsake thee. Call him holy, even though he should leave thee; and when he seems not to hear thy prayers, yet do not thou forget his praises.

4—6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

Think of our Divine Lord thus taking the very lowest place, and becoming, as it were, something less than man,—just that little crimson worm which has simply a life made up of blood. Christ likens himself to it as he says, "I am a worm, and no man."

7, 8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the* LORD *that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

Oh! these were cruel and cutting words. Like a sharp razor, they cut to the very heart of our Divine Master as he heard his enemies exulting even over his faith, as though it had come to nothing, for now Jehovah himself had forsaken him, and left him to die alone upon the tree.

9, 10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*

Sometimes, we also may derive great comfort from this truth to which our Saviour here refers. When we could not help ourselves in the least degree, the Lord preserved us, so will he not again help us when we are at our worst? You who have reached your second childhood may reflect with gratitude and hope upon the way in which God took care of you in your first childhood. Then, you certainly were entirely dependent upon him, yet you fared well; and so you shall if each sense shall fail you,—if the power of moving shall be taken away, and the power of sight, and the power of hearing, yet the Lord, who blessed you when you were just born, will still preserve you right to the end. You remember how the Lord puts

this truth in Isaiah xlvi. 4: "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

Our Saviour, having comforted himself thus, falls to praying again:—

11, 12. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.*

These were the Pharisees, the chief priests, and the strong Roman soldiers that compassed our Saviour when he was upon the cross.

13, 14. *They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

Can you not see your Saviour hanging on the accursed tree,—every particle of him as it were loosened from its fellow by the fever raging in his whole being, and the anguish and deep depression of his spirit?

15. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;*

Such was the intensity of his anguish that the fever within him turned his mouth into an oven, and his tongue was so dried up that it could scarcely stir.

15. *And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

As if his whole body were prepared to go back into its primary elements. He feels in himself the sentence pronounced upon the first Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

16. *For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:*

These were the common people, the rabble, the multitude that thronged around, barking at him like a pack of hungry hounds.

16. *They pierced my hands and my feet.*

This little sentence shows that this Psalm must relate to the Lord Jesus. Truly did David see him in vision. It happened not to David to have his hands and feet pierced; but this was the portion of David's Master and Lord; he could indeed say, "They pierced my hands and my feet."

17. *I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*

He is emaciated through his fasting and all the agony he has endured, and his bones seem to break through his skin by reason of the cruel scourging to which he had been subjected.

18, 19. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength,—*

That is, El,—the name he gave to God in the first verse: "O my strong One,"—

19—21. *Haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

Did you notice that flash of light gleaming through the darkness, "Thou hast heard me"? Perhaps it was at that moment that the sun again shone forth; at any rate, it is clear that the lost light had returned to our suffering Lord, for the rest of this divine soliloquy is full of comfort and confidence.

22. *I will declare thy name unto my brethren:*

His first thought, even in his agony on the cross, was about them; and he seemed to say, "When I have risen from the dead, I will tell them all about this time of trial; and through the ages to come, I will tell my people how thou didst help me,—the greatest of all sufferers,—and that

thou wilt help them also. I was left for a time, and yet I was not finally left. I cried, 'Lama sabachthani,' and yet I triumphed, even then, and so shall they. They shall do as I have done,—confide and conquer."

22. *In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

And you know that he did so; he stood in the midst of his people, and told them what God had done; and, spiritually, he stands in our midst at this moment, and he leads our songs of praise unto Jehovah.

23, 24. *Ye that fear the* LORD, *praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

What a change of note! If men could hear us speak when we are in the depths of sorrow, they might conclude that God had forsaken us; but when we get out again, how quickly we eat our words, and how soon we begin to tell the goodness of the Lord! Then we lift up the joyous strain, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

25. *My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.*

Christ still praises God in the great congregation. On my way to this evening's service, I called to see one of our dear brethren who is very ill, and I was much refreshed with a sweet thing that he said:—"When we all get to heaven, we shall feel quite at home there, for you know, sir, we have worshipped in a great congregation for these many years." And so we shall. There is something most exhilarating and refreshing in going with a multitude to keep holy day; the more, the merrier; but what shall be the joy in heaven, where the number of the redeemed cannot be counted, and all shall be continually praising God? This was one of the joys that was set before Christ, for which "he endured the cross, despising the shame."

26. *The meek shall eat and be satisfied:*

Even in the time of his great agony, our Lord was thinking of you hidden ones, you little ones, who think yourselves worth nothing. Christ says that he was finding bread for you, for he gives us his flesh to eat, that flesh which is meat indeed.

26. *They shall praise the* LORD *that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.*

Because he died, all who trust in him shall live for ever. Oh! how sweetly does he die, with the thought of their eternal bliss upon his mind!

27. *All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the* LORD: *and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.*

He sees the result of his death; he beholds the fruit of his soul-travail; and his heart is glad within him.

28—31. *For the kingdom is the* LORD'S: *and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.*

The Psalm really ends with almost the last cry of our Lord upon the cross: "It is finished." So the whole Psalm is a window through which we can see into the inmost heart of Christ when it was being rent upon the cross.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LEARNING IN PRIVATE WHAT TO TEACH IN PUBLIC.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 13TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, December 24th, 1882.

"What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."—Matthew x. 27.

I HOPE that many who are now present long beyond everything else to be useful to their fellow-creatures. We do not want to go to heaven alone; we are most anxious to lead others to the Saviour. I remember a very remarkable telegram, which was sent from England, by a lady who had sailed from New York with all her children. She landed in England after being shipwrecked, but she had to send to her husband this brief but suggestive telegram, "Saved,—*alone.*" Ah! that last sad word seemed as if it took almost all the sweetness out of the first one. "Saved alone." May that never be what we shall have to say as we enter heaven; but may we have the privilege of saying, "Here am I, Father, and the children whom thou hast given me." May it be my joy to be able to say, "Here am I and all my congregation, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."

So we begin with the assurance that all of you who know the Lord want to be useful; but, if that is to be the case, preparation is necessary. You say that you are going out to battle, young man, do you? Well, do not be in such a hurry. You have no rifle or sword, you will be in the way of the other soldiers rather than an addition to them. Unless you are, first of all, properly trained, you will certainly make a failure of your soldiering. The man who jumps into the army is not a warrior all at once; there must be drill, there must be a certain course of training, before he can be of any service to the Queen. So is it with Christ's disciples. He did not send them out to preach directly he called them from their former occupations; but he kept them with himself for a time till they had learned at least some of the lessons they were to impart to others; for how could they teach what they did not know? Can a thing which is not in a man come out of him? And if it has never been put into him, how can it be got out of him? So our Saviour,

in the words of our text, encouraged his disciples to proclaim, even upon the housetops, the gospel which he had revealed to them; but he also gave them to understand that, first of all, they had need of preparation before they would be qualified to deliver their message: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."

I. I want, first, to speak to you, who desire to work for Jesus, concerning his own definition of AN INVALUABLE PRIVILEGE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS: "What I tell you in darkness," "what ye hear in the ear."

From our Lord's words, I learn that it is the great privilege of Christians to realize, first, that *Christ is still alive, and still with his people*, still conversing with his chosen ones, still by his Divine Spirit speaking out of his very heart into the hearts of his true disciples. Christ was born an infant, but he is no infant now. Christ died, but he is not dead now. He is risen; he has gone up into his glory; he sits upon the throne of God; but, at the same time, by a very real spiritual presence he is with all his people, as he said to his disciples, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And there is nothing that can so fit a man for holy service as to have Christ's eyes looking into his eyes, and reading him through and through, and to have Christ's pierced hand laid on his heart till the very impress of its wound is there reproduced, filling that heart with a loving grief for others. "Oh!" says one, "I think that I could speak for Christ if that should ever be true to me." Ah! my friend, you will never speak aright until it is true to you. Not with those mortal eyes will you see him, but your heart shall behold him without any help from those dull optics. Not with your ears shall you hear his voice, but your heart shall attend to his message without the use of those poor impediments of ears. You shall know that he is with you, you shall be sure of it, for his life shall touch your life, his spirit shall flood and overflood your spirit; and then, but not till then, shall you be fit to speak in his name. That is the first part of this invaluable privilege, —we are permitted to realize our Lord's presence with us personally.

Next, *we are enabled to feel Christ's word as spoken to us:* "I tell you." The message of the gospel is applied by Christ directly and distinctly to our own soul. We do not look for any new revelation, but we do expect the old revelation to be made to our hearts and consciences in all its wondrous power. We expect that the words which Jesus spoke should ring in our souls with such music as they evoked when he first uttered them, and that we should, by the working of his Spirit, feel the force of those words just as they did who heard him with their outward ears; and we shall never fully preach the gospel till then. A man may go to College, he may learn all about the letter of Scripture, but he is no minister of God if he has not sat at Jesu's feet, and learned of him; and when he has learned of him, and the truth has come home to his heart as his own personal possession given to him by Christ, then shall he speak with more than mortal power, but not till then. Step back into the rear rank, sir, if Christ has never spoken to you thus, and wait there

until he has done so. If the Master has given you no message, do not run; what is the use of running if you have nothing to tell? Do you think that you are to make up your own message as you run? Ah! then, you are not Christ's servant, for his servant waits until he has heard the message from his Master, and then it is both his duty and his privilege to tell it out just as he has heard it: "What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear,"—"I myself whispering it into your personal ear, that you may receive it direct from me,—this it is which you are to go and proclaim upon the housetops."

The text seems to imply that *these communications are made to us again and again.* There are some of us who are called to spend our whole lives in our Master's service; and unless we are often alone with him, listening to the message he has for us to deliver, our streams will not continue to run. I thank God that, during the last few weeks, while I have been in the South of France, I have had a blessed period of privately hearing the word afresh from the Master. It has been a constant joy and delight to me to meditate again and again upon the truths which I have preached, to feed upon them in my own soul, and in quiet communion with God to be gathering spiritual stores of nourishment for you, of which, first of all, I had proved the power and preciousness to my own heart. I would earnestly urge all Christian workers to be sure to get some time alone for the prayerful study of the Word. The more of such time that you can get, the better will it be both for yourself and for others. You know that it is impossible for a sower of seed to be always scattering, and never gathering; the seed-basket must be filled again and again, or the sowing must come to an end. You cannot keep on distributing bread and fish to the multitude, as the disciples did, unless, every now and then, you go back to the Master, and say, "My Lord, I need more bread and more fish, for my supply is running short. Give me more, that I may give out more."

Make such occasions as often as you can. I am glad to see so many of you, my young friends, busy for the Master; but I pray you not to forget that it was Mary, who sat at the Master's feet, of whom he said that she had chosen that good part which should not be taken away from her. It is well to be like Martha, busy on your Lord's behalf; but you cannot do without Mary's quiet meditation. You must have the contemplation as well as the activity, or else you will do mischief, and not really honour the Master. Suppose you see a carpenter, with a little hammer in his hand, go round the workshop, and gently tap a hundred nails on the head; you rightly say that he has not done any good at all. But here is another workman, with a good heavy hammer, and when he does hit a nail, he drives it home, and he does not leave it till he has driven it home, and clinched it, too. There is a way of seeming to be doing a great deal, and yet really doing nothing; and there is also a way of apparently doing but little, but then it is good solid work, thoroughly well done. Nobody can do this solid, permanent work, in a spiritual sense, without often getting alone with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Avail yourselves also, dear friends, of those special opportunities which God makes for you to receive his messages. Sometimes he takes one of his servants, and puts him right away for a while. "Be thou silent," says he, "and I will talk to thee." Perhaps the Lord takes away the strength, the bodily vigour of his servant; there is the Christian woman, who longs to be going up and down her district, laid upon a sick bed; or there is the earnest, faithful Sunday-school teacher, no longer able to instruct his class. Yet it is in God's wisdom that the nets are sometimes drawn out of the water, that there may be an opportunity to mend them, otherwise they would not always take the fish that are ready to be caught. It is true economy to let the cannon rest till it gets cool, or else there may be mischief done to the men who are firing it, instead of to the enemy; and all of us need rest, every now and then, if we are to be fitted for future service. Above all, we need often to go to Christ, to get from his hand a fresh stock of that gospel provision which we are afterwards to dispense to the people in his name. I pray you, who are seeking to serve the Saviour, to take good note of the advice I have been trying to give you.

II. Now, secondly, this going to Christ, to hear the Word directly from him, is itself A MOST BLESSED PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR ALL CHRISTIAN WORKERS. Let me show you how it is so.

First, if you get your message of mercy directly and distinctly from the living Christ, *you will have truth in its personality*,—living, acting, feeling, for he is "the way, the truth, and the life." The message will come to you with power because he uttered it, and you will therefore preach him as well as it. We do not want a misty, cloudy Christ—a sort of impalpable phantom, to comfort us; we want a real Christ, God and man, really among us, and really able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by him. So, my dear brother, if you go to him for your message, you will be sure not to forget him. He will be real to you, and your teaching will make him real to other people. Some ministers preach very finely about Christ; but that which saves sinners is preaching Christ himself. He is our salvation, and we shall never put that salvation in tangible, graspable, real form unless we go to him, and get distinctly from himself the message we are to deliver on his behalf.

By doing this, we shall also have *truth in all its purity*. You know that, when the light of the gospel shines through me, it takes a little tinge of colour from me, just as when it shone through Luther, there was a Lutheran shade about the truth; and when it shone through John Calvin, there was a Calvinistic tinge. Shining through any man, God's light will be tinged to a certain extent, just as it is when shining through the very best glass that was ever made. You had better get into the sunlight for yourself, so that you may have it in all its purity. I am of the mind of that man who said that the milk was so bad where he lived that he would move into the country, and keep a cow for himself. It is just so with the gospel; there is nothing like going to the Lord Jesus Christ himself as to the well-head of doctrine, and saying to him, "Master,

what dost *thou* teach? What can I learn from *thee?*" Our unfailing rule is,—What did Jesus say about this or that? How did his Spirit speak by the apostles? It is that living with Christ, from day to day, which will give us the truth of God in all its purity.

And it will also give us *truth in its due proportions.* We are all of us lopsided in one way or another. I suppose that there is not a pair of eyes in this world that is absolutely a pair. There is scarcely anything about us that is exactly as it ought to be; we are all of us somewhat wrong; and, hence, there is no man who teaches all truth in its exact proportions. One man sees the responsibility of man, and he preaches it; another sees the sovereignty of God, and he preaches that. Cannot we find a brother who preaches both those truths? Yes, no doubt we can; but, then, that brother will probably fail to see some other truth. If we knew all truths in their right proportions, we should be God rather than man, for we should practically possess omniscience. But to avoid giving undue prominence to any one truth, and casting another truth into the shade, the best remedy is to get your teaching direct from Christ himself. You think you see a certain doctrine in the Bible; well, then, take it to him who gave you the Bible, and say, "Blessed Lord Jesus, by thy Spirit, teach this doctrine to me. Let me know, by thy teaching, what this passage of Scripture means, for I am prepared to receive whatever thou dost impart to me."

If you do this, dear friends, you will get truth in its personality, truth in its purity, truth in its due proportions.

And, let me add, that you will then get *truth in its power.* When the truth of God has broken your heart, and afterwards bound it up; when Christ has so spoken it to you that you have felt the power of it, then you will speak it as men should speak who are ambassadors for God. George Fox was called a Quaker because, when he preached, he often trembled and quaked. Was that folly on his part? Nay; for he had so felt the power of what he spoke that his very body was full of emotion while he delivered that truth to others. And well may you and I also tremble at the Word of the Lord. But, on the other hand, whenever that Word comes home with sweetness to the heart, you must often have noticed with what sweetness the man tells it out to others. There is nobody who can preach the gospel like the man who has experienced its power. You know that the tale of a tale, the report of a report, is a very poor thing; but when a man gets up, and says, concerning some notable event, "I was there, I saw it all," then you listen to him. So, if you can say of Christ, "He is indeed precious, for he is precious to me; he can save, for he has saved me; he can comfort, and cheer, and gladden, for he has done all that to me,"—then you speak with power to others, because Christ has spoken with power to you.

And there is something more than that. A man who receives the gospel distinctly from Christ will speak *the truth in Christ's spirit.* Did you ever hear a man preach the gospel in a passion? You wonder at my question, yet such a thing has happened; but if you are present on such an occasion, you feel sure that the man did

not get his message—or, at any rate, he did not get his manner—from his Master. The other day, I saw a man offer a bit of bread to a poor, lean, half-starved dog; the animal did not seem to care for bread, so he turned away; and, then, directly, the man was so angry with the creature because he would not have the bread that he threw a stone at him. There is a certain kind of preaching that is just like that; the minister seems to say, "You dogs of sinners, there is the gospel for you; will you have it? If you do not, I will throw a stone at you." Well now, neither dogs nor men admire that sort of treatment; and, certainly, the Lord Jesus Christ never intended us to deliver his message in that kind of fashion. There are some, I believe, who preach the doctrines of grace very much as a dog of mine acts with his rug. When I go home to-night, he will bring it out, and drag it up to my feet, just because he wants me to try and take it away from him, that he may growl over it. So have I seen some people preach the doctrine of election, and other truths like it, as if they wanted some Arminian to try to run away with them, or have a fight over them. Now that is not the way which Christ teaches us to preach; he never bids us proclaim the gospel in such a way that we seem to want to make an Irish fight over it. No, no, no; go direct to Christ for truth, and you will preach it strongly, honestly, openly, positively, but you will always preach it with love.

That is the plan I recommend to you,—the system of getting the gospel fresh from the mouth of Jesus, and then delivering it, as far as we can, in Jesus Christ's tones and in Jesus Christ's spirit. I can assure you, my dear friends, that we shall never know how Jesus preached till we hear him speak in our hearts, and then endeavour to imitate the tone of that speech which our inward ears have heard. Oh, to preach Christ in a Christly way,—to tell of mercy in the spirit of mercy, and to preach grace in a truly gracious way!

Here is the time to say that, if you go to Christ for all the truth you preach, and if you proclaim it in his way, then you will preach it with what is called "unction." Do you know what unction is? I do, but I cannot tell you. I can tell when a man has not any unction, and I can tell when he has; but I do not know exactly how to define and describe it, except by saying that it is a special anointing from the Spirit of God. There is an old Romish tale of a monk who had been the means of converting great numbers of persons; but, on a certain occasion, he was detained in his journey, and could not reach the congregation in time to conduct the service. The devil thought it was a fine opportunity for him to speak to the people, so, putting on the cowl of the monk, he went into the pulpit, and preached; according to the story, he preached about hell,—a subject with which he was well acquainted,—and the hearers listened very attentively. Before he finished his discourse, the holy man appeared, and made the devil disclose himself in his proper form. "Get you gone," said he to Satan, "but however dared you preach the truth as you were doing when I came in?" "Oh!" replied Satan, "I did not mind preaching the truth, for there was no unction in it, so I knew that it could not do any hurt

to my cause." It was a curious legend, but there was a great truth at the bottom of it,—where there is no unction, it does not matter what we preach, or how we preach it. One of my friends behind me sometimes says to me, after the service, "I believe that God has been blessing the people, for there has been plenty of dew about." That is what we want, that holy dew, which the Spirit of God so graciously bestows. You may preach to one congregation, but it is all in vain, for there is no dew about; but, at another time, it is sweet preaching and blessed hearing, because there is plenty of dew about; and the way to get that dew is by coming straight out of the Master's presence, with the Master's message ringing in your own ear, to tell it out as nearly as possible as he has told it to you.

Once more, this preparation for declaring the truth is very valuable, because it enables a man to have *truth in its certainty*. Concerning the truth of God, questions are continually being raised nowadays; many people ask, with Pilate, "What is truth?" Even preachers put that question. Why do they not hold their tongues until they know? Suppose a servant comes to the door to bring you the answer to a question which you have sent to her mistress. She begins to talk on all sorts of subjects, and you say to her, "Do you not know what the reply is from your mistress to my enquiry?" She says, "Well, to tell you the truth, I have not been to her to know what her reply is, but I am making up an answer myself." Of course, you say to her, "I do not want to hear your answer; go to your mistress at once, and whatever message she has to send to me, kindly report it to me, for that is all I want to know." So we say to the minister, "Tell us what your Master has told you; we don't want to hear anything else." If he says, "I think ——er, I beg your pardon, I am very anxious not to appear dogmatical; but with great diffidence I submit to you," you reply, "My dear sir, we want you to be dogmatical. If you have been to your Master, and he has given you a message for us, tell it to us; and if you have not been to him, and he has not told you anything to say on his behalf, then clear out of that pulpit, for you have no right to be there. Go and earn an honest living at breaking stones, or something of that sort." An ambassador who is not commissioned by his sovereign had better be sent home by the first ship that is going that way. He who comes professedly as a messenger from God, and yet declares that, for the life of him, he does not know what God would have him preach, proclaims his own condemnation, and we say to him, "We cannot let our souls run the risk of being lost; so, if you have no message from Christ for us, we will not waste our time by listening to you." Be sure, dear friends, to have as your minister a man who lives with God, and walks with God; a man who leans his head on the bosom of Jesus, and then comes forward and speaks what his Master has whispered right into his ear. Men are startled when they hear him; they say, "Who is this fellow? Where did he learn such things?" But, with awful earnestness, so that his hearers sometimes think him half-demented, he tells out what he feels that he must tell out because he has received it from his Lord and Master. He says, "That is the truth, whether you take

it or leave it. I will preach to you nothing but what God has told me. I cannot and I dare not turn aside from what I believe to be his teaching." Look at Martin Luther whom God raised up to speak so bravely for him. People said, "This man is so positive, so dogmatic;" but he could not be otherwise, his whole heart and soul were possessed by certain great truths, and he felt that he must proclaim them, whether men put him in prison, or dragged him away to the stake. And such a man, speaking after that fashion, shook the Vatican and the most powerful empires of the earth, and was the means of bringing light to multitudes who otherwise would have remained in darkness. In like manner as the Reformer did, get you to your Lord, my brother; get you to your Saviour, my sister; receive your message from him, and what he speaks privately into your ear, that tell you wherever you have the opportunity, but mind that you do not tell anything else.

III. Now I must finish with THE CONSEQUENT PROCLAMATION: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."

First, it has been told me in the ear, and whispered into my very soul, that *there is pardon for the greatest guilt through faith in Jesus Christ*,—that his precious blood, shed on Calvary's cross, is able to cleanse from all sin of every kind, and that as many as believe in him are saved. "Their sins, which were many, are all forgiven." I heard this said once, and I thought it was true; nay, I heard it many times from those who would not have said what was false. But, on a never-to-be-forgotten day, I myself looked to him who did hang upon the cross. It had been dark days with my spirit until then, and my burden had been exceedingly heavy; I was like a man who would have preferred to die rather than to live, and I might even have laid violent hands upon myself, in the hope of ending my misery, but that the dread of something worse after death did haunt me. I found neither rest nor respite until I heard one say, "Look unto Christ, and you shall be saved. Look, young man, look; for he says, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;'" and there and then I did look unto him; and that my sins were at that moment forgiven me, I do know as surely as I know that I am standing here, and speaking to you. I might be made to doubt some things about which I feel tolerably certain; but I must absolutely lose my reason before I can ever doubt the fact that I then passed out of despair into something higher than hope, and rose from the very gates of hell into a joy that is with me, even now. Shall I not tell to others what the grace of God has done for me? Shall I not lay hold of every poor sinner's hand, and say, "Look you to Christ, and you also shall be saved, even as I was"? Shall I not, from the very housetops, shout again and again,—

> "There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
> There is life at this moment for thee"?

Further, there is another thing that has been whispered in my ear. It is that, *by faith in Christ, the ruling power of sin is*

immediately broken, and that every sin, of every kind, may be overcome by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. I heard one man laughing at another because he said that he had a clean heart. Ah, me! but that may have been true, for every man who believes in Christ has a clean heart. Are you nominally a Christian, and yet your Christianity does not make you holy? I implore you to throw such worthless Christianity to the dogs, for it is worse than useless to you. If your religion does not make you holy, it will damn you as surely as you are now alive. It is simply a painted pageantry to go to hell in; but it is not the true religion of the Lord Jesus Christ. He that believes in Christ shall be delivered from sin, he shall trample it under his feet; he may have a life-long battle with it, nay, I am sure he will have that, else Christ would never have taught his disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." When there is no more sin in us, we need not fear temptation; there is no risk of fire to the man who has no tinder in his heart. The Lord can keep his people, and he will preserve them. "He will keep the feet of his saints." Brother, have you fallen into drunkenness? Faith in Christ can turn that cup bottom upwards for you. Are you a swearer? My Master can rinse your mouth out, so that you shall never speak in that shameful fashion any more, or even be tempted to do so, for I have known swearers cured in a moment, and the temptation to blaspheme has never come back to them. Have you been a thief, or a liar? Have you been a fornicator, or an adulterer? Are you unjust, unholy, and unclean? There is provision for washing sinners such as you are; there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and Christ can deliver you from the power as well as from the penalty of sin. Only trust him about it; come and rest your soul upon him. Oh! if there be a harlot here, or a man who has fallen into all sorts of gross sin, Christ can and will deliver you if you will only come and repose your heart's trust in him.

I cannot tell you all that I have had whispered into my ear, but I must mention one other thing that I know; it is that *faith in Christ can save a man from every sort of fear in life and in death.* Faith in Christ can make even trouble to be welcome, and affliction to be regarded as a gain. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can make poverty to be sweet, and sickness to be borne with patience. The ills of life are turned into blessings when once a man believes in Jesus, and fully trusts in him. I am not now saying what I alone know, but what a great many others here also know. There are hundreds—I might truthfully say thousands—here who can say the same as I can about these matters. Let me prove my assertion. You who have found that faith in Christ sweetens life to you, speak out, and say, "Yes." Has Christ sweetened life to you who have believed in him? If so, say, "Yes." [Many voices: "Yes."] Of course you can say it, and you are not ashamed to say it over and over again; is he the joy of your heart? [Voices: "Yes."] Has he made your very soul to leap within you when you have kept close to him? [Voices: "Yes."] I knew that you would answer "Yes" to that question, for it is even so with you; there is a joy,

which sometimes comes upon the Christian, and which I cannot attempt to describe, but it bears us right away above all physical pain, and everything that might depress the spirit; and the heart is made strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Oh, he is a precious Christ! Is there one person here who has trusted in Christ, who is willing to give him up? [Voices: "No."] There is not one, I am sure. You hardly need to answer the question, for there never was one individual, who really knew Christ, who could give him up. They who leave him have only fancied that they knew him; they have never really trusted him.

Possibly, dear friend, you are in trouble because you say that you feel afraid to die to-night. Well, but perhaps you are not going to die to-night; and, therefore, dying grace has not yet been given to you. But when the time comes for you to die, then very likely you will not feel the slightest fear. My brother said to me, the other day, when he had been seeing one of our members pass away, "Brother, we can say to one another what the two Wesleys said, 'Our people die well.'" So they do; they often die shouting for very joy; and, at any rate, they go home peacefully, quietly welcoming the everlasting future and the glory that Christ has laid up for them. Oh, yes! we know that "to die is gain." Some of us have been laid very low, and we have thought that we were about to die, and we have had the greatest joy then,—greater than we ever knew before in all our lives; and, therefore, we tell it out to others, and we mean to tell it out as long as we live. Salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus, is no dream, no fiction, let sceptics say what they will. Our experience—and we are as honest as they are, and no more fanatical than they are,—our experience agrees with what our Lord has revealed to us in his Word; and, therefore, when we preach the gospel, or relate what grace has done for us, we use Christ's very words, and say, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." God grant that many of you may be able to bear similar testimony, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW X. 1—27.

Verses 1—4. *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphæus, and Lebbæus, whose surname was Thaddæus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

The lesson to be learnt from these names is, first, that these men are mentioned in couples, and I think that, as a rule, God's servants work best in pairs. In other senses than the matrimonial one, it is not good that man should be alone. Moses needs Aaron; Peter needs Andrew; James needs John. It is well to be of such a temperament and disposition that

you can work harmoniously with another of your Lord's servants. If you cannot, pray God to alter you.

Notice that expression, in the 3rd verse, "*and* Bartholomew." I think there is not a single instance in the New Testament where Bartholomew is mentioned without the word "*and*" before or after his name,—"and Bartholomew," or "Bartholomew and" someone else. Perhaps he was not a man who ever began any work by himself, but he was a grand man to join in and help it on when somebody else had started it. So, dear friend, if you are not qualified to be a leader in the Church of Christ, be willing to be Number Two; but do serve the Master, in some capacity or other, with all your might. Be a brother who carries an "and" with him wherever he goes; be like a horse, that has his harness on, and is ready to be hooked into the team. That is the lesson of the two words "and Bartholomew."

The last lesson from the names is at the end of the 4th verse: "and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him." He preached of Christ, he worked miracles in the name of Christ, he was ordained as one of the apostles of Christ, yet he was "the son of perdition." Oh! let none of us be content merely with our official position, or trust in the good which we hope we have done, or in any gifts with which the Master has entrusted us. Judas Iscariot had all these marks of distinction, yet he betrayed his Lord. God grant that no one among us may turn out to be a Judas Iscariot!

5, 6. *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

The gospel is now to be preached to every creature in all the world; but, in those days, it was to be proclaimed first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans, and afterwards to the Gentiles as a whole. The largeness of our commission to "preach the gospel to every creature" need not prevent our following providential directions to make it known in one place rather than in another. It is well for the servants of Christ always to ask their Master where they are to go. You know how it is recorded, in the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul and Silas "essayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not." Ask the Lord, therefore, where thou shalt work, as well as what thy work shall be, for thy Master knows how thou canst best serve him.

7. *And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

That blessed kingdom, which is now set up among men, of which Christ is the King, and I hope many of us are the subjects. That kingdom was then "at hand."

8. *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.*

"Exercise your healing arts most freely. They cost you nothing; let them not cost anything to those who receive the benefit of them."

9, 10. *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.*

They were to "quarter on the enemy," as we say. Wherever they went, they would be furnished with food, and raiment, and shelter, if they faithfully executed the commission with which their Master had entrusted them.

11—13. *And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

How about your houses, dear friends. Are they "worthy" houses, in

this New Testament sense? If an apostle came there, could he bring "peace" to it? Or would he have to take the peace away with him to some other house that was more worthy to receive it?

14, 15. *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.*

Despised and rejected privileges make the fiercest fuel for the fires of hell. They who might have heard the gospel, and would not hear it, shall find the hand of God more heavy upon them than it will be even upon the accursed Sodomites. Woe, then, unto such as live in London, yet who will not hear the Word of the Lord, or, when they do hear it, will not accept it!

16, 17. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men:*

"Do not trust yourselves with them."

17—19. *For they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.*

"Let it not fret you that you are not orators, that you are not men of culture; speak what God the Holy Spirit shall teach you to say, and leave the result with him."

20. *For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*

Oh! that is grand,—when a man has so communed with God that the very Spirit of the Father has entered into him. Then shall there be a wondrous power about his speech; men may not understand whence it came, but they will be obliged to feel the force of it.

21. *And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.*

Read the martyrologies, and see whether it was not exactly as our Lord foretold that it would be. In martyr times, men often burst all the bonds of natural affection, and betrayed even their own fathers or children to death. Yet the saints quailed not; they were content to let every earthly tie be snapped so that the tie of their heavenly and eternal relationship might be confirmed. So may it be with us also!

22—27. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.*

God help us so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—785, 766, 658, 538.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

JEHOVAH'S CHALLENGE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 20TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, December 31st, 1882.

"Is there any thing too hard for me?"—Jeremiah xxxii. 27.

A TRUTH may be sincerely believed by us, and yet it may do us good to have it put in the form of a question. As I read the chapter, I called your attention to Jeremiah's confident declaration to God, "There is nothing too hard for thee." Yet in our text, which is only a few verses further on in the chapter, the Lord says to this same prophet, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" I think the explanation of this mystery is that we do not always thoroughly believe even all that we do truly believe. We may believe it so as to have no doubt upon it, but not so believe it as to be prepared to put it into practice. Jeremiah might say to the Lord, "There is nothing too hard for thee," and he might be confident of the truth of his words; yet there might be, in the background, so much of mistrust, possibly imperceptible to himself, that it might be necessary for God to put the matter to him in the form of a question, and to say, even to believing Jeremiah, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" Ah! we little know what unbelievers we really are. The most of us are scarcely aware of what an awful amount of scepticism still lies lurking within our breasts, only waiting for the opportunity to show itself.

Besides, dear friends, you must always remember that it is one thing to believe a general doctrine, but it is quite another thing to make a particular and personal application of it. Jeremiah believes that God can drive away the Chaldeans, and leave the land free for the use of its owners; but can he believe that the little plot of ground at Anathoth, for which he has just paid seventeen shekels of silver, will ever be worth the money it has cost him? I expect the devil began to inject doubts into his mind concerning that transaction by saying to him, "Can you trust God about that purchase of land?" So the Lord does not at once accept Jeremiah's declaration

when the prophet says, "There is nothing too hard for thee;" but he puts to him a direct question relating to that very point, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" Some of you think you could believe concerning the conversion of a nation; but do you never have doubts concerning the conversion of a perverse child? You believe in the peacefulness that is to reign during the millennium; but have you never had a doubt about the peace of your own domestic circle? You could trust God, you say, in a storm at sea; but can you trust him about that bad debt on your books? You could depend upon him, you say, in death and throughout eternity; but can you depend upon him about that trifling matter which just now is bothering you, and giving you so much vexation? Is there anything, great or small, that is too hard for God? That is the question I am going to try to answer. I throw down the challenge, in the name of the glorious God who said to Jeremiah, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" Now is your opportunity to bring up your hard things, your difficult things, your apparently impossible things, and to see how they are affected by this challenge of the Most High: "Is there any thing too hard for me?"

In calling attention to this challenge of Jehovah, I ask you to remember, first, that *the hardest conceivable things have already been done by God.* Next, I will mention *some of the hard things which remain to be done;* and, lastly, since nothing is too hard for the Lord, I will try to answer the short and simple question, "*What then?*"

I. First, then, I want you to remember that THE HARDEST CONCEIVABLE THINGS HAVE ALREADY BEEN DONE BY GOD.

Let us begin at the beginning, with *God's work of creation,* as Jeremiah does in this very chapter; and we shall then say, with him, that Jehovah "made the heaven and the earth." There was a time when there was nothing that had been created, and God dwelt alone. There was no raw material out of which to construct the universe; yet, when it pleased him to do so, everything was formed and fashioned by God out of nothing. What, then, can he not do after having done that? I ask you also to think what God afterwards did. At first, when he made the world, he left it for ages in an unfinished state, for "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void;" but, long afterwards, when he came to put it in order, and make it fit for man's abode, and then to create man to have dominion over all the earth, who was with him to help him? "With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him?" With his own hand, he piled up the mountains, and digged the foundations of the great deep. His unaided power achieved it all. Everything was in darkness even after he had made it; but he spake, and said, "Light, be;" "and there was light." Everything was in confusion and chaos, the earth and the waters were mingled together; but again he spake, and divided the land from the sea, and the clouds uprose to paint the sky, the rivers sought their bed, and old Ocean was girt about with his belt of sand. God did it all; but, even then, the world was dead, no life was anywhere to be seen.

But again God spake; and, straightway, the earth was green with grass, and herbs, and trees; the waters teemed with fish; all kinds of birds began to fly in the open firmament of heaven; and multitudes of beasts ranged the plain. Then, last of all, God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Now, whenever we doubt the power of God to do anything, let us read again the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, and then say, with Jeremiah, "Ah, Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee!" There is nothing which the Lord did not make, and he made it all unaided, and did it all alone, by his own unguided wisdom and skill. Therefore, one of the hardest things that ever could be done, was done by God when he accomplished his great work of creation.

Now let us think of his work under a different aspect; that is, *his work of destruction;* and let any who doubt the power of God tremble as they hear or read how he has displayed it. Again and again has the Lord shown how easily he can rid himself of his adversaries, and shake them off, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire. Go far back in the history of the world, and note how all mankind had become corrupt; they who ought to have been holy, and separate from sinners, had mixed themselves with the ungodly; and on a certain day, when God's patience had at last reached its limit, he spake, and down came torrents of rain, descending with tremendous power, and, at the same time, the sluices of the great deep were unlocked, and up leaped the fountains that till then had been sealed; and, very soon, over the whole earth there was one great sheet of water, for God had determined that he would destroy all flesh from off the face of the earth, save a "few, that is, eight souls," whom he had housed within the ark. Terrible as the work of destruction must have been, it was done as God determined; and, after that, let none ever think that God cannot overcome his enemies. Let no one ever imagine that a warfare can be successfully waged against him. When he bares his arm for battle, his foes shall all flee before him like chaff before the wind, or they shall fall before him like the wheat falls before the reaper. He can create and he can destroy; in looking back upon what he has already done, we can see that he has accomplished inconceivably great and difficult things both in making and in unmaking. "Ah!" say you, perhaps, "these are sublime things, on an enormous scale." Yes; but God is great on any scale, and almighty wherever you perceive the signs and tokens of his working.

Think, next, of *his work for the defence and deliverance of his chosen people.* Read the Book of Exodus; you cannot too often read the wondrous story of how, when the children of Israel were few in Egypt, God nevertheless preserved them; and how, when they multiplied, and the cruel Pharaoh arose, and tried first to curb

and then to crush them, God remembered his people, and determined to bring them out of the land of bondage. Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go." How that proud monarch bridled up when he heard those words! "Who is the Lord," said he, "that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" He soon knew who Jehovah was, for plague followed plague, till everything that Egypt had was smitten; and, last of all, God "smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham." Then the oppressors opened wide their gates, and Egypt was glad when Israel departed. With a high hand, and an outstretched arm, the Lord brought forth his people; and when they came to the Red Sea, and the Egyptians pursued them, and the tyrant thought that he should surely destroy them, for the wilderness had shut them in, then the Lord divided the sea, and led his people through the depths in safety, "but the sea overwhelmed their enemies;" and on the farther shore, Miriam and the women joined in the jubilant refrain to the triumphant song of Moses and the Israelitish host, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Brethren, after this mighty act of Jehovah, you need never imagine that he cannot deliver his people. You need not suppose that a little church, or a little island, or a little nation, shall be domineered over by the proud ones of the earth. If God shall but repeat that ancient command, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," it will be a case of "Hands off" for the oppressors, however mighty they may be, and they will have to learn that they must not touch the elect of the Most High to do them harm.

If you want another instance of God's wonderful working, I remind you that harder things than we need to have done for us by God have been done by him in *the work of his providence.* Think how he led his people through the wilderness, and fed them for forty years, though all that time they never stirred a plough in the furrow, or gathered fruit from fig tree or from olive. A pathless desert was the highway of the millions who were his people. Heaven dropped with daily manna for them, and the smitten rock yielded a perennial stream to quench their thirst. When they craved flesh to eat, the Lord sent them feathered fowl innumerable. Their garments waxed not old upon them, neither did their feet swell for forty years in that great and terrible wilderness. When you think of all this, my poor brother, you may well say, "If God could do that great work, surely he can provide for my little family." Of course, he can; the God who could, for forty years, feed three millions of people, who marched or halted with nothing but bare sand beneath them, can much more feed thee, O thou of little faith!

All these are great things that God hath done; but I am going to take you into much greater depths than we have traversed yet, for all this is as nothing compared with what God has done in *his great work of redemption.* Creation is shorn of its glory; the

terrors of God at the deluge may almost be forgotten; the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea may take quite a secondary place; and the leading of the people through the wilderness may be put quite in the background when I begin to tell the story of our redemption. This is the hardest thing, the most wonderful thing, God has ever done. His Son came down to live among men; he took on him a human form, and was born of the Virgin Mary, sheltered in a stable, cradled in a manger. This is such a miracle that all the other miracles I ever heard of seem commonplace affairs compared with this wonder of wonders,—that God should take upon himself the nature of man, and then,—more marvellous still,—take upon himself the sin of his people, and bear the awful load of their transgression, and all the burden of their punishment, and endure it even to the last pang, drinking up the cup of infinite justice to its dregs. Never was God so Godlike as when Jesus died upon the cross. Never was omnipotence so potent as when he died that men might live, crushing the old dragon as he bled, leading captivity captive while he was himself bound to the accursed tree, casting death into an eternal grave when he himself was laid in the sepulchre. I cannot adequately tell you the story of all these marvels; the very angels in heaven have been set a-wondering ever since that day, and they have been continually telling to one another, over and over again, the story of the God that loved and died, and by his love, and death, and living again, defeated Satan, conquered death, and led captivity captive for all his people. I feel more inclined to burst out with "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" than to say even a single syllable more concerning this greatest of all God's works.

Certainly, in what I have said, I have fully proved that the hardest conceivable things have already been done by God; and therefore, he may well ring out the challenge of our text, "Is there any thing too hard for me?"

II. Now, secondly, I am going to mention SOME OF THE HARD THINGS WHICH REMAIN TO BE DONE.

The hardest things have been done by God; what remains to be done? Look within you, look around you, find out all the difficult things that you need to have done for you, and then see how easy it is for the Lord to meet your every need. *Some of the hard things relate to temporal matters.* "It would be a great thing for God to deliver me out of all my troubles," says one; "for I am sorely afflicted and tried." But, really, my dear friend, after all that God has done, will you, can you, dare you think to yourself that he cannot deliver you? Are you his child? Do you love him? Do you trust him? Then, surely, you will not say that he will leave you,—that he will forsake you,—or that he cannot help you! I am certain that you would be ashamed to lead anybody to think that God could not deliver you; yet you have, perhaps, allowed the thought to creep into your own mind. Then drive it out at once; do not let it remain there a moment longer. God can help you, and in very simple ways, too.

I have known him deliver his people in very extraordinary and

unexpected ways. There was a poor man, not long ago, who had no bread for his family, and they were almost starving. One of his children said to him, "Father, God sent bread to Elijah by ravens." "Ah, yes!" he replied; "but God does not use birds in that way now." He was a cobbler; and a short time after he spoke those words, there flew into his workshop a bird, which he saw was a rare one, so he caught it, and put it in a cage. A little later, a servant came in, and said to him, "Have you seen such-and-such a bird?" "Yes," he answered, "it flew into my shop, so I caught it, and put it into a cage." "It belongs to my mistress," said the maid. "Well, then, take it," he replied, and away she went. Perhaps you think that there was not anything very remarkable in that incident; but when the girl took the bird to her mistress, the lady sent her back to thank the cobbler for his care of her pet, and to give him half a sovereign; so, if the bird did not actually bring the bread and meat in its mouth, it was made the medium of feeding the hungry family although the father had doubted whether such a thing could happen. God has blessed ways of delivering his people if they will but trust him. I do not doubt, if this were the time for such testimony to be given, that every Christian here could tell some story of the way in which God has delivered in time past. "Oh, yes!" says one, "I could, I know." What, you? Yet you are the very one who doubts God's power to deliver you. Cover your face for shame, and cry, "Lord, have mercy upon me, forgive my unbelief, and help thy poor child to trust thy fatherly care, and to know that thou wilt provide for me."

But, next, *some of the hard things relate to spiritual matters.* I fancy that I hear someone say, "I have a trouble which causes me more anxiety than the things you have just mentioned. I know that God can provide for me in temporal matters, but I have a very hard fight of it spiritually. I am tempted, first in one way, and then in another, till I sometimes fear that I shall not be able to hold out. Satan appears to know just where I am weakest, he shoots at the joints of my harness, and all his fiery darts seem to make an impression upon me, and sorely wound me. I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy." David said something very much like that; yet he did not perish by the hand of his enemy, King Saul; but he died in his bed, rejoicing in his God. And very likely it will be the same with you; at any rate, if you are trusting in Christ, you shall not be overcome, for greater is he that is for you than all that can be against you.

Do you believe that you, a child of God, cannot be so helped by him that you shall be able to overcome any kind of sin? Surely you cannot believe anything so dishonouring to your Heavenly Father? If you do, I do not; I cannot tell how God's mind comes into contact with man's mind, but I know that it does,—that his Spirit comes into most intimate connection with our spirit, and so influences our spirit that the sin, which once seemed to fascinate and charm us, loses all its attractions and delights; and the doubts and fears, which for a while depress us, have by-and-by no depressing power whatever. You remember how Eliphaz said to Job, "At

destruction and famine thou shalt laugh;" and God often helps his servants to laugh at those very things which before seemed great burdens to them. There is nothing in your spiritual case that is too hard for the Lord; so bring it before him in faith and prayer this very hour.

I fancy that I can hear someone else saying, "*But I am not God's child;* oh, how I wish that I could be! Alas! I am a great sinner." What has been your sin, my friend? I do not want you to tell me; I only ask you what it was that you may tell it to yourself, and then answer the Lord's question, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" If Christ had not died, it would have been useless to ask you that question; but since Jesus died, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," and since it is written, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," can there be any thing conceivable that is too hard for the Lord? There is no sin, which thou hast committed, which the blood of Christ cannot wash out if thou believest in him. Though thou wert even red with murder, and black with blasphemy, and covered from head to foot with the filthiness of lust, yet, on thy believing in Jesus, thou wilt be made, there and then, as white as snow. Free pardon for every kind of sin is proclaimed to every soul that will believe in Jesus Christ. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," if they will only trust in Christ. So, in this sense, there is nothing too hard for the Lord, there is no sinner too guilty for the Lord to forgive when he trusts the Saviour's sacrifice on Calvary.

"Yes," says another friend; "I can understand that I can have forgiveness; but this is a greater difficulty to me, I have been so long a transgressor of God's law that *I do not think I ever could conquer my sin.*" No, I know that you could not, and I want you to be fully persuaded that you could not; and then, when you are perfectly convinced upon that point, let me ask you this question, "Is even this thing—this power of overcoming sin—too hard for *the Lord?* Your successful resistance is out of the question; you cannot accomplish anything in this great conflict, for you are nobody and nothing; but is the struggle too hard for the Lord?" It often happens that a man says, "Well, I know that I have been a great drunkard; drinking has been my besetting sin, but I can leave it off when I like, and become a sober man at once." So he does, and he signs the pledge, and wears his blue ribbon; but, by-and-by, the colour of that ribbon ought to be ruby rather than blue, for the man has given way to strong drink again. The reason of his fall is that he cured himself, and so the disease came back again. But the drunkard who says, "I am afraid to trust myself, for this intemperance has got such a hold on me that I never can get out of its clutches by my own power; O God, deliver me! I trust thee to save me, I look to Jesus Christ to save me,"—he is the man who *shall* be helped, and he shall be more than a conqueror through the might of God. Let me assure you, my dear friend, that there is no form of sin from which you cannot be delivered by the grace of God. After many years of vice,—prolonged, continued, inveterate, horrible vice,—men have not only

been reformed and reclaimed, but they have been renewed, sanctified, and made pure and holy.

I wonder how you would have felt, if you had been visiting in certain of the South Sea Islands, and you had been sitting at the Lord's table with some good old deacon, and then, after you had been eating and drinking with him at the communion, and had heard him pray and preach, somebody had whispered in your ear, "That man used to be a cannibal. He has murdered many." "Oh!" you would say, "and has the grace of God changed such a lion as that into a lamb?" It would have struck you as a very remarkable illustration of the power of divine grace; yet there are, even in this Tabernacle to-night, cases that are quite as striking as that; if you could know all about them, you would agree with me that it is so. God's grace can do marvellous things; it can change lions into lambs, ravens into doves, and sinners into saints; in fact, the proof of Christianity is the moral change which it is continually working in the minds and lives of men and women. Above all other miracles stands this one,—the miracle by which the dishonest are made just, the impure are made clean, and the disobedient are brought to the obedience of faith.

Truly, there is no case that is too hard for the Lord. I suppose a good many of you never heard that "Satan" came into this place, one Sabbath, and was converted.* "No," you say, "surely that has never happened." Yes, it has; I can vouch for the truth of the story. There was a sailor, who lived at Wivenhoe, in Essex, a man who was such a vile blasphemer, and who lived altogether such a disgraceful life, that the people called him "Old Satan." When the ship in which "Satan" sailed came to London, a godly seaman, who was on the same vessel, persuaded the man to come to hear me. He was the more willing to do so because I once lived at Colchester, which is not far from Wivenhoe. As he heard the Word, the Lord touched "Old Satan's" heart, and there was never before such a stir in Wivenhoe as when he went home, a converted man, to tell other sinners the power of the grace of God. If there is anybody here who might be called a very devil, let him come, and trust Christ, and he shall be saved straightway. Come along with you, poor slave of Satan. Leave your old master this very minute; do not give him even a moment's notice, but speed away to the great Father's house, and he will receive you, for he is expecting you; nay, more, it is he who is drawing you by his gracious Spirit, and it is his Son who has said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." God grant that many, who have been hard sinners, may come to Christ, and find in him eternal life!

Once more, Jehovah's challenge, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" *contains a lesson for you who are trying to serve the Lord.* I want you also to catch the meaning and the message of my text;—there is nothing too hard for God, so he can save the children in your Sunday-school class, he can bless the people of the

* The remarkable story of this man's conversion is related at greater length in *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*, Vol. IV., with other similar narratives.

district where you visit, he can help you to talk to that dying person whom you went to see yesterday. There is nothing too hard for the Lord, so he can bless you, city missionary, to that dark slum which gives you so much anxiety; he can bless you, dear friend, at that street corner where you scarcely get through a dozen sentences before you are interrupted. This question of Jehovah, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" seems to be like a rallying cry from God to urge all his followers to press on, like heroes, without a doubt about the victory. "Courage, my comrades," said Mohammed to his troops, one day, when the battle was going against them; "I can hear the angels coming to our rescue." There were no angels flying to help him, but they are ever coming to aid us, when we need them, for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" If we are truly trusting in the living God, he will surely send the heavenly principalities and powers to help us, so that, in our weakness, his strength shall be glorified, and sinners shall be saved.

I can believe in the conversion of the Jews when I hear Jehovah's challenge, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" I can believe in the spread of his gospel over the whole world when I hear him ask, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" I can believe in my Master setting up a kingdom that shall have no bounds, and no end, when I hear his royal enquiry, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" Very often, when we get among men and women, we seem to be surrounded by a lot of children playing with toys, for they bother, and hinder, and hamper us, and only increase our own helplessness; but when we get clear of them, and just look to God alone, then we seem to have elbow-room for our work. A thoroughly consecrated man can do something, by God's grace, when he has got rid of the intolerable nuisance of having too many human helpers, who are often only hindrances, and who has not any other helper but his God. Oh, it is a blessed thing to be flung back upon the bare arm of omnipotence,—to be gloriously compelled to rest on God, and on God alone! May many of us know, by happy, personal experience, how blessed it is!

III. I have done, dear friends, when I have, in the last place, very briefly answered a short and simple question. Since nothing is too hard for the Lord, WHAT THEN?

I want that we, as a people, should be true to the very core to our blessed God; and, to that end, as there is nothing that is too hard for him, *do let us trust him*, all of us, whatever our trials or our difficulties may be. Let us have no sham faith, no pretended confidence, but real trust in a real God.

Then, next, I want that we should *act as if we trusted God.* Do not let us waver, "for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."

And, then, believing in God, *let us always do what is right.* Let us believe that, to do the right, is ever right;—that policy, that "hedging" a little, and doing what we call a slight wrong, can never be justified in the sight of God.

Finally, *let us live a life of love*, a life of forgiveness and kindness,

trusting that God will cause love to overcome human hate, and kindness to conquer all misrepresentation. Live in all respects so as to glorify God.

Beloved in the Lord, who are one with us in Christ Jesus, do be out-and-out believers; and let your faith be as evident as the colour on a healthy cheek, that all men may see that the very life-blood of your spiritual being is your faith in God and in his Christ. What made brave Oliver Cromwell, in the days gone by, so terrible an enemy to all who loved not liberty and right? It was his faith; and he had gathered about him a band of men who also believed; and so, when the Ironsides marched to the fight, you might as well have hoped to stay the stars in their courses as to keep those men back from victory. And, to-day, what England needs is men of faith, whose watchword is, "The Lord of hosts!" and whose confidence it is that "with God all things are possible," and also that "all things are possible to him that believeth." May all of us be such believers, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JEREMIAH XXXII. 1—27.

Verses 1—5. *The word that came to Jeremiah from the* LORD *in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the* LORD, *Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; and Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; and he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the* LORD: *though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper.*

So you see that Jeremiah was shut up in prison at the time here mentioned. Zedekiah, the king of Judah, had treated him very harshly, because of his faithful utterance of the Word of the Lord. He was a true servant of Jehovah, yet he suffered much at the king's hand. One very remarkable event, which happened at that time, is here recorded.

6—8. *And Jeremiah said, The word of the* LORD *came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the* LORD, *and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the* LORD.

The Lord had told him beforehand that it would be so; and, therefore, in due time, his cousin came to him with the offer of this plot of land in the country of Benjamin.

9, 10. *And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances.*

This was, in every respect, a very extraordinary transaction. Remember

that the Chaldeans were already besieging Jerusalem, and they were all over the land, carrying fire and sword into every part of it. Jerusalem was straitly shut up, so that none of the inhabitants could get out of the city; yet here is Jeremiah, himself a prisoner, buying land which was virtually worth nothing whatever; but he believed so firmly that the Chaldeans would yet permit the Jews to live unmolested in that land that he paid down the purchase money for the field, and saw to the legal execution of the deed of transfer, just as you or I might have done if we were purchasing a plot of land in our own country. This is a notable instance of the triumph of faith over unfavourable surroundings, and also of the prophet's obedience to the Word of the Lord.

11, 12. *So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison.*

Jeremiah did all this openly. What they may have thought to be an absurd action, he did not do in private; but in the presence of them all. True faith in God does not go in for hole-and-corner transactions. Faith can do its business in the light of the sun. Faith believes God under all circumstances, and believes that the truest common sense is to obey his Word. Therefore she is not ashamed of what she does; neither shall she ever have cause to be ashamed or confounded, world without end. There is a living God; and if we do what he bids us, good must come of it. No harm shall happen to the man who confidently rests in the Most High.

13—17. *And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the* LORD *of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the* LORD *of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land. Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the* LORD, *saying, Ah Lord* GOD!

Faith cannot live without prayer. When she has performed her most heroic deeds, she turns to God and humbly asks for renewed strength; for oh! my brethren, the best of men are but men at the best; and those who have the most faith never have any to spare.

Jeremiah says, "I prayed unto the Lord, saying, Ah Lord God!" It looked, at first sight, as if the prophet was going to utter some mournful complaint, or to express some doubt or misgiving concerning the purchase of the land; but it was not so. Having allowed that exclamation to escape from him, his faith came to the rescue, and he continued:—

17. *Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:*

Is not that a grand sentence? "There is nothing too hard for thee." He that could make the heaven and the earth can do anything. Read, in the Book of Genesis, the story of the creation, and see how "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast;" and then judge as to what can ever be a difficulty to the Almighty. Surely you must say to him, as Jeremiah did, "There is nothing too hard for thee."

18. *Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the* LORD *of hosts, is his name,—*

See how these godly men, in their times of trouble, delighted in the

great names and glorious attributes of God. There are, nowadays, many namby-pamby, fashionable religionists, wrapped in luxury, who have only a little god; they never seem to know "the Great, the Mighty God;" but Jeremiah, with the smell of the prison still clinging to him, talks grandly: "the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name,"—

19—21. *Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; and hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror;*

Those ancient Jews, in the time of their trouble, always looked gratefully back to the wonders wrought by Jehovah in Egypt. That great deed of God, when he smote the might of Pharaoh, was always present to the Hebrew mind; and the people, in every season of tribulation, refreshed themselves with the remembrance of it. Well, then, dear friends, as they sang the song of Moses, shall not we sing the song of the Lamb? Will not we go back in thought to the glorious triumphs of our Redeemer, and recount again and again, for the encouragement of our faith, what Christ did for us upon the tree, even as the Jews thought often, for the strengthening of their confidence, of their wondrous deliverance from Egypt by the high hand and the stretched out arm of Jehovah?

22—24. *And hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: behold the mounts,—*

The margin renders it, "the engines of shot," which we see, by the next chapter, were powerful enough to throw down the houses in Jerusalem.

24, 25. *They are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord* GOD, *Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.*

I suppose that, although Jeremiah, with unquestioning faith, had done as God had commanded him, yet afterwards, when he was alone in his prison cell, he began to think the whole matter over; and though he may not have had any actual doubts, yet he probaby had some anxieties as to the issue of the whole affair. He could not quite understand it, so he wisely put it before the Lord. Some of you, who have truly trusted God, may yet be just now perplexed with anxiety of one kind or another. Well, then, tell it all out before the Lord; go at once into his presence, and spread the case before him, as Jeremiah did.

26, 27. *Then came the word of the* LORD *unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the* LORD, *the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?*

That question we will try to answer presently.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—34, 686, 1042; AND FROM "FLOWERS AND FRUITS"—54.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COMFORT FROM THE FUTURE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 27TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, January 30th, 1881.

"Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."—Job xi. 16.

JOB'S misery was extreme, and it seemed as if he could never forget it. He never did forget the fact of it, but he did forget the pain of it. That he had been utterly miserable, would always remain recorded upon the tablets of his memory; but the wretchedness itself would not remain. It would be so entirely removed that it should be as a thing that has been altogether forgotten. Nothing better can happen to our misery than that it should be forgotten in the sense referred to in our text; for then, evidently, it will be clean gone from us. It will be as it is when even the scent of the liquor has gone out of the cask, when even the flavour of the bitter drug lingers no longer in the medicine glass, but has altogether disappeared. So is it with the sorrow that has so effectually gone out of the mind that it is just as though it had never been there.

If anyone here is in misery of any kind,—whether it be misery of physical pain, or misery of want, or misery of soul on account of sin, or the loss of the light of God's countenance,—I can only pray for you, dear friend, that you may speedily forget your misery, and only remember it as waters that pass away. The thing goes to be done; it is quite possible, and you may expect it. If you look carefully at the connection of our text, and give earnest attention to the matter, I do not doubt that you will experience this blessed forgetfulness. When we are in pain of body, and depression of spirit, we imagine that we never shall forget such misery as we are enduring. The sharp ploughshare has gone down so deeply that we think it has made a mark in the soul that can never be erased. We seem to lie all broken in pieces, with our thoughts like a case of knives cutting into our spirit; and we say to ourselves, "We never shall forget this terrible experience." And yet, by-and-by, God

turns towards us the palm of his hand, and we see that it is full of mercy, we are restored to health, or uplifted from depression of spirit, and we wonder that we ever made so much of our former suffering or depression. We remember it no more, except as a thing that has passed and gone, to be recollected with gratitude that we have been delivered from it, but not to be remembered so as to leave any scar upon our spirit, or to cause us any painful reflection whatsoever. "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

I. I am not going to limit the application of the text to Job and his friends, for it has also a message for many of us at the present time; and I shall take it, first, WITH REFERENCE TO THE COMMON TROUBLES OF LIFE WHICH AFFECT BELIEVING MEN AND WOMEN.

These troubles of life happen to us all more or less. They come to one in one shape, and perhaps he thinks that he is the only man who has any real misery; yet they also come to others, though possibly in another form. There is certainly a cross for every shoulder to bear; Simon must not bear the cross alone, and all the rest go free. There is no road to heaven without its stones, or without its Hill Difficulty; and I think that there are few pilgrims from the City of Destruction who get to the Celestial City without passing through the Valley of Death-shade, and having to fight with giants and even with Apollyon himself. Cowper truly wrote,—

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

There is much joy in true religion. Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her." But, still, notwithstanding the joy, and in addition to it, there is sorrow; there is misery lurking close by the believer's pathway, and it is ever ready to pounce upon him somewhere between here and heaven. The Lord of the pilgrims was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" and his disciples must expect to fare even as their Master fared while here below; it is enough for the servant if he be as his Lord.

You, dear friends, who are just now enduring misery, should seek to be comforted under it. Perhaps you will ask me, "Where can we get any comfort?" Well, if you cannot draw any from your present experience, seek to gather some from the past. You have been miserable before, but you have been delivered and helped. There has come to you a most substantial benefit from everything which you have been called to endure. You must be conscious that, when you think of your troubles, you can say, with Hezekiah, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live." Or you can say, with the psalmist, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." I believe that, very often, God sends his very choicest love-tokens to us in black-edged envelopes; and many a time has it happened that the great rumbling waggons of tribulation have been those which have

brought the heaviest weight of treasure to the doors of the saints. Do we ever learn much without the rod? I fear we do not; most of us are quickest learners, I think, when we smart most. Well, then, if affliction has been profitable in the past, let us rest assured that it will be so in the future.

Let us gather consolation also from the future. If, as the apostle truly says, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," recollect how he goes on to say, "Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." I have been trying to ring the changes on those two words, during the last few weeks, while I have been laid aside by illness: "nevertheless afterward"—"nevertheless afterward"—"nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The apostle James tells us that "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." He does not complain because his corn is buried under the clods, and covered with the snow; but he lives upon hope, and rejoices in the future harvest, pleading the promise, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." In your own case, dear friend, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, what will happen in the future? For it is with that I would comfort you at this time. Why, this is what will happen: "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." How will that be?

Well, first, *by the lapse of time.* Time is a wonderful healer. Hearts, that seem as if they must break when first the trial comes, at last grow quite used to it. Look through the veil of a few minutes, gaze through the longer vista of a few years, and that which seemed dark as tempest wears quite another aspect. Oh, if you, whose hearts seem now almost ready to burst, could but project yourselves only six months ahead, if you could leap forward a year, and then look back, probably even in that time you would almost have forgotten your misery.

Ay, but there is something better than the lapse of years, and that is when, *during a considerable time, you are left without trial.* That is a sharp pain you are now enduring; but what if you should have years of health afterwards? Then you will forget your misery. That is a sad loss which you have been called to suffer, it seems to you to be a crushing disaster, but what if it should be succeeded by years of prosperity? Remember how Job forgot his misery when, in a short time, he had double as much of all that he possessed as he had before. He had back twice the amount of all his former wealth, he had again a smiling family around him, so he might well forget his misery. Year after year, and, perhaps, even to his death,—it was so as far as we know,—Job was again a man who had a hedge made round about him and all that he had, and in the happiness of his later life he might well forget his former misery. Well, now, it is very likely to be so with you after you get through this present struggle; therefore, keep your heart up,

believe in God, have confidence in him, and all shall be well. There is wonderfully smooth sailing on ahead for some of you when you are once over this little stretch of broken water. If you can safely pass over this stony portion of the road, it will be good travelling for you all the way to heaven. Recollect that the horses' heads are towards home, you are journeying to your Father's house, so be of good courage, for you shall forget your misery, and only remember it as waters that pass away.

And besides the lapse of time, and an interval of rest and calm, it may be—it probably is the fact with God's people—that *he has in store for you some great mercies.* When the Lord turns your captivity, you will be like them that dream; and you know what happens to men who dream. They wake up; their dream is all gone, they have completely forgotten it. So will it be with your sorrow. Through God's goodness, you will seem suddenly to wake up out of a dreary dream, and then you will begin to laugh, and soon your mouth will be filled with laughter. You will almost despise your former depression of spirit; and when you see the abundant mercy of God toward you, all your misery shall seem like a dream that has gone, a vision of the night—unsubstantial, unreal, —that has melted into nothingness. Some of you have no idea what is reserved for you; you would not be weeping, but laughing, if you did know what God has in store for you,—I mean, even here below. It is good for us not to be able to read the roll closed by the hand of God; but we may be sure that there are such blessed things in it concerning our future that each believer may well say, "I will not be bowed down by the trials of the present, but my spirit shall rejoice in God, who doeth for me what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and what my heart hath never conceived."

Be of good courage, brother, sister, in these dark, dull times, for, mayhap, this text is God's message to thy soul, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." It has been so with many, many, many believers in the past. What do you think of Joseph sold for a slave, Joseph falsely accused, Joseph shut up in prison? But when Joseph found out that all that trial was the way to make him ruler over all the land of Egypt, and that he might be the means of saving other nations from famine, and blessing his father's house, I do not wonder that he called his elder son "Manasseh." What does that name mean? "Forgetfulness"—"for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." Why, sitting on the throne there, feeding the nation, and blessing his father and his brethren, he must have thought that the being cast into the pit, and being sold to the Ishmaelites, and being put into prison, was not worth recollecting, except for gratitude to God that it ever happened as a means to the grand end of helping him up into that position of usefulness. And Joseph is not the only one who has had such an experience as that. Read the Scriptures through, and you will find that those whom God has called and anointed to eminent service have been put, like the blades of Damascus, into the fire, and drawn through the fire again and again, that in the day of battle they might strike on the

northern iron and steel, and yet not turn their edge. These servants of the Lord have been prepared for an immortal destiny by desperate griefs; and—

"The deeper their sorrows, the louder they'll sing."

As a woman remembereth no more her travail, for joy that a man is born into the world, so has it happened to the believer in the time of his sorrow; he has forgotten it, cast it all away, because of the greater joy which God has brought out of it. Jabez is the child of sorrow, but he is therefore more honourable than his brethren. The more stormy the sea, the sweeter the haven. The rougher the road on earth, the better the rest above. So, poor tried child of God, believe that this text is intended to be a divine message of comfort to thy heart, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

Thus much on the first head.

II. I should be greatly rejoiced if, in the second place, I might speak A CHEERING WORD TO POOR SOULS UNDER DISTRESS ON ACCOUNT OF SIN. I mean you who long to be saved, yet cannot understand how it is to come to pass, or who, understanding the plan of salvation, are somehow unable to appropriate it to yourselves. You feel as if you have your eyes bandaged, and your feet fast fixed in the stocks, so that you cannot go to Christ, and cannot even look to Christ, and therefore your souls are full of sorrow. I want you, dear friends, specially to notice what Zophar recommends to a man who has sin upon him. Read the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th verses of this chapter: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." I recommend these words to you also; only I have something even better to recommend to you. Does any man here say, "I cannot get peace with God; I am full of misery on account of sin"? I know all about you, friend; I have gone that road, long ago. I have been splashed up to my very eyes in the mire of the Slough of Despond; and I sometimes get a little of its mud in my eyes even now.

Well, now, I exhort you, first of all, to *look to Christ, and lean on Christ.* Trust in his atoning sacrifice, for there alone can a troubled soul find rest. If you say that, somehow, you cannot get peace, then I shall have to ask you to see whether, perhaps, sin may not be lying at the door. To use Zophar's expression, have you prepared your heart? Have you gone to Christ with your whole heart and soul? Have you sought him with all your might? I hope you realize that repentance and faith are very bad things to play with, for such play will damn a man's soul. These are things to be earnestly used in a most solemn undertaking. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence" in this matter. We can neither repent nor believe with half our heart; it is our whole soul that is required if salvation is to be ours. Now, hast thou sought the Lord

with all thy heart? If thou hast, thou wilt surely find him. I am certain that thou wilt; and then, afterwards, "thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." There was never a man yet who, with all his heart, did seek the Lord Jesus Christ, but sooner or later found him; and if you have been long in seeking, I lay it to the fact that you have not sought with a prepared heart, a thoroughly earnest heart, or else you would have found him.

But, perhaps, taking Zophar's next expression, you have not stretched out your hands toward the Lord, giving yourself up to him like a man who holds up his hands to show that he surrenders. You must come and say, "My opposition is all over; I have no quarrel now with God; I yield unconditionally to him." The word may refer to one who stretches out his hands to grasp whatever may come from God within his reach. He stretches out his empty hands, asking to have them filled; stretches out his entreating hands, pleading that God will bless him. Well now, if you have done that, you shall get a blessing.

Further, you may and you shall forget your misery, provided you fulfil one more condition mentioned by Zophar, and that is, that you are not harbouring any sin: "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles." There is an old-fashioned grace that I am never ashamed to preach, though some, who call themselves evangelists, have folded it up, and put it away in the back cupboard; they never mention this old-fashioned grace, which is called repentance. Now, I learn from the Scriptures that repentance is just as necessary to salvation as faith is; and the faith that has not repentance going with it will have to be repented of one of these days. A dry-eyed faith is a faith that will save no man. Peter's message was, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" and our Lord's own declaration was, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He began his public ministry by crying, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel," which means just this, that if any man is living in sin, it is no use his praying, or pretending to believe, until he gives up that sin. If there is any passion that you are indulging, any lust that is your master,—if you are carrying on a wicked business,—if you are living in wilful transgression of God's law, Christ can save you from your sins, but even Christ cannot save you in your sins. If you will have your sin, you must be lost, so stands God's decree. Christ must, by his grace, separate you from your sin, or else you will be separated from him for ever. I want this to be a very heart-searching word; and therefore I say to any miserable man or miserable woman here,—You shall forget your misery if you give up your sin, and trust in the sin-atoning Saviour. Come, friend, you shall not say that I am flattering you, for I tell you plainly that you must fly for your life from the dearest sin that now lays hold upon you.

"Oh!" you say, "but how am I to do it?" Christ will help you. Trust him to help you. But if you say, "I will trust him to save me," and yet continue to live in sin, he will not save you. That is

not the salvation that we preach; we proclaim salvation from sin, for that is the salvation which Jesus came to bring to us. You must, as Zophar said to Job, put your iniquity far away, and you must not let wickedness dwell in your tabernacles; that is to say, in your tents, in your houses. I know some men, who will never get peace of conscience, and rest of heart, while they let their wives live as they do live, and while they allow their children to live as they do live. Some of you will not find mercy for yourselves while you neglect your children's highest welfare as you do. I know some men,—I hope they are good men, but certainly they are not good fathers. They are so peaceful, and gentle, that they never like to utter a word of reproof; their boys and girls may go where they like,—I might almost say that they may go to the devil if they like,—yet their father has not a word to say to them; do you call that proper conduct for a professedly Christian man? There are some parents, who allow their children to do such things that God is grieved with them for their children's sakes; and they will never get peace of mind till they set their house in order. What! is God coming to live where there is no family prayer, where there is no care for his name or his day, where there is no rebuke of open sin? It has filled me with unspeakable sorrow when I have heard of Christian parents whose boys swear, and whose girls are allowed to go where, if they are not ruined, body and soul, it is little short of a miracle. Oh, do see that you let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles, you who are the people of God, and you who wish to be his, if you would have Zophar's words to Job fulfilled in your experience, "Then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

III. Now let me tell you HOW SWEETLY GOD CAN MAKE A SINNER FORGET HIS MISERY.

The moment a sinner believes in Jesus Christ with true heart and repentant spirit, God makes him forget his misery, first, *by giving him a full pardon.* All his sin is forgiven, and therefore he feels ready to dance for joy, and he soon forgets his misery. By faith, he gets a sight of the great pardoning Lord, and of his atoning blood. He sees the Son of God suffering and dying for him on the tree, and he is overjoyed at the revelation of such a wondrous redemption. He claps his hands, and he forgets his misery.

Next, *he rejoices in all the blessings that God gives with his grace.* He reads that those whom Christ has pardoned "are justified from all things," from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. He learns that they are clothed with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, and he forgets his own nakedness while he rejoices that he is so wondrously clothed. He feeds on the bread of heaven, and forgets his former hunger. He drinks of the water of life, and forgets his previous pangs of thirst. He enjoys the liberty of the sons of God, and he forgets the chains he used to wear as Satan's slave. He has peace with God, and he forgets the trouble that was such a burden on his heart. He is so full of joy that there is no room for sorrow; and if, perchance, the tear of repentance still

lingers in his eye, it is not sullen but sweet sorrow, and the tear glistens in the sunlight of God's countenance like the diamond, or like some choice pearl that slumbers in its shell. Oh, beloved, if you will but come to Christ, and leave your sin, whatever your misery is, you shall forget it; or, if you do recollect it at all, it shall only be to remember it as the snow that has melted and vanished, or as the rain that has soaked into the earth, "as waters that pass away."

Now, dear friends, all that I have been saying to the sinner is quite as applicable to every backsliding child of God. It may be that some of you who are here are Christians;—that is, you have trusted in Christ to save you;—but you have got into a very sad state of heart. You have not half the spiritual life that you once had, and therefore you do not glorify God as you once did. It is most grievous to think how many professing Christians live at a poor dying rate; they seem to be just alive, or hardly that. Well, dear brother or sister, if you have become miserable, I am rather glad that you have. That is part of the way towards a better state of things. When a man cannot be happy in a backsliding state, he will soon seek to get out of it. The smart is a part of the cure. Solomon says, "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil;" and the chastisement which follows sin is often for the healing of the sinner.

IV. I will bring my discourse to a close with this last reflection. THIS TEXT WILL COME TRUE TO THE SICKENING, DECLINING, SOON-DEPARTING BELIEVER.

Ah! dear friend, when first you found out that the complaint from which you are suffering really was consumption, what a chill seemed to come over everything! When the physician said to you, very tenderly but very faithfully, "I fear I cannot do much for you. I can perhaps give you a little relief, but I dare not deceive you, for you have an incurable disease;"—then, although you are a child of God, you endured a great deal of misery, and spent many long, sleepless nights looking forward to you scarcely knew what. Are you still in that state, my dear sister? As you get worse and worse, do your spirits continue to sink? My dear brother, as you gradually fade away, does the light seem to fade, too? Well, then, listen. If thou hast believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if thou art resting alone upon him, recollect that, in a very short time, "thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." In a very, very, very short time, your suffering and sadness will all be over. I suppose the expression, "waters that pass away," signifies those rivers which are common in the East, and which we meet with so abundantly in the South of France. They are rivers with very broad channels, but I have often looked in vain for a single drop of water in them. "Then," perhaps you ask, "what is the use of such rivers?" Well, at certain times, the mountain torrents come rushing down, bearing great rocks, and stones, and trees before them, and then, after they have surged along the river-bed for several days, they altogether disappear in the sea. Such will all the sorrows of life and the sorrows even of death soon be to

you, dear friend, and to me also. They will all have passed away, and all will be over with us here. The passage to the grave may be sharp, but it must be short.

> "The road may be rough, but it cannot be long,
> So I'll smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

And then, you know, dear friends, those waters that have passed away will never come back again. Water that is spilt upon the ground can never be gathered up again, and it is one of the charms of the heavenly world that our sorrows will never reach us there. No more poverty, no more cold, no more heat, no more sin, no more depression of spirits, no more pain, no more forsaking of friends, no more sorrow of any kind, for "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." That is a very beautiful expression: "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Here, they keep clinging to us, one on one arm, and the other on the other arm. Sorrow and sighing will come with us wherever we go; and we sometimes say to them, "Now, you might go somewhere else, for we do not want you;" yet they still hold fast to us; but when we get up to the golden gate, no sooner shall the light eternal flash on our eyes than we shall look in vain for our old companions, for they will be gone. "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away;" and lest there should be any trace of their mournful companionship left, we are expressly told that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Thank God, we shall recollect our sorrows in heaven only to praise God for the grace that sustained us under them; but we shall not remember them as a person does who has cut his finger, and who still bears the scar in his flesh. We shall not recollect them as one does who has been wounded, and who carries the bullet somewhere about him. In heaven, you shall not have a trace of earth's sorrow; you shall not have, in your glorified body, or in your perfectly sanctified soul and spirit, any trace of any spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing that shall show that you ever had a pang on earth, or even that you ever committed a sin. Some diseases, you know, leave marks on our hands or faces, so that we say to our friends, "Do you see that lump? It was a time of terrible pain that brought that up, and I fear it will not go away." Ah! but, in heaven, there will be no trace of anything like pain or sorrow of any sort. All sorrow and suffering shall be gone, and we shall forget our misery, or only remember it as waters that have passed away, never to come back again.

This is the sum and substance of all that I have been trying to say to you: "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." Christian men do not live on the comforts of this world; their inheritance is on the other side of Jordan. If you are like Esau, and can be content with red pottage, well, you may have it; but you will lose the birthright if you

do not prize it. But if you are God's true Jacob, you will gladly give up the pottage to get the promise of the future inheritance. Oh, what a blessed thing is the faith that enables the soul to postpone the present in order to obtain that blessed future! For what is the present, after all, but a fleeting show, an empty dream? But the future is eternal and incorruptible, reserved in heaven at the right hand of God, where there are pleasures for evermore.

Now that, by God's mercy, I find myself again in your midst after a season of sore suffering, I desire to forget my miseries,—and some of them have been very sharp ones. I am so glad to be here again, to see you all, and I pray that it may be a long time before I am deprived of the great privilege of speaking to you in the name of the Lord. I bless God to-night, and praise his name in the great congregation; and I ask for every brother and sister that, when your time of misery comes, you may be brought through it all, and come out of the big end of the horn, rejoicing in the cornucopia of God's bounty and blessedness, and praising his name, as I do at this time with all my heart. Oh, may every one of you find this text to be true to you, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away"!

The blessing of the Lord be with you all for evermore! **Amen.**

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOB XI.

The words we are about to read were spoken by one of Job's three friends,—or what if I call them his three tormentors? These men did not speak wisely, and their argument was not altogether sound; but, for all that, in the instance before us, Zophar the Naamathite spoke that which was truthful. Although he made a great mistake in turning it against Job, yet what he said was in the main correct, and we may learn from it as we read it. Remember, dear friends, that whenever you read the words of these three men, you must take them with a good many grains of salt. They are not to be accepted as if they were God's Word, because they are not. Those three men were mistaken in many points, yet very much of what they said was weighty and valuable, and is still worthy of our careful consideration.

Verses 1—3. *Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?*

This was a very bitter and cruel speech, and Zophar was not using the language of friendship, or even of common courtesy. First, he charged Job with being a great talker, "a man full of talk." No doubt Job did speak well and eloquently; but to retort upon him that he was a man abundant in words, was a very cruel thing, especially when he was in such a condition of distress and suffering. Yet, dear friends, it is an evil thing to be men of tongue, and not of hand; it is a dreadful thing to be men—or, for the matter of that, women either—who are "full of talk," and therefore have no room for anything else. There are some people who seem to think that, simply by their volubility, they can carry all before them! In such a case, we may say with Zophar, "Should not the

multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified?"

But he went beyond these questions, and charged Job with downright lying because he had pleaded his own innocence: "Should thy lies make men hold their peace?" Zophar also insinuated that Job fumed and frothed, as it were, and spoke folly, which he certainly did not do, for he spoke in solemn, sober earnest if ever a man did.

4. *For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes.*

Job did not say that; at least, he did not say it in so many words. He did endeavour to prove his own innocence of the false charges that were brought against him; but he never said that he was clean in God's eyes.

5, 6. *But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is!*

Oh, that God would enable you, dear friends, to see your sin, and make you perceive that there is a double meaning in his law,—a deep, underlying, spiritual meaning, as well as that which is apparent on the surface, so that a man may be guilty of transgression even when he thinks it is not so! Oh, that God would unveil the secrets of his wisdom so as to make you see that he is wiser than all his works, that his hidden wisdom is double that which you have been able to perceive in nature, or in providence, and infinitely greater than he has ever made to appear before men's eyes.

6. *Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.*

That was a hard thing for Zophar to say to Job; but, still, it was true, and it is true in the case of all of us: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

Even when a man sits down among the ashes, robbed of all his property, and bereaved of all his children, and when he has to scrape himself with a potsherd because of his many sore boils, even then it may be truly said to him, "God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth."

7. *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

What wonderful questions these are! How they ought to convict those who glibly talk of God as if they could measure him with a foot rule, and understood exactly what he ought to do and ought to be. We are constantly meeting with statements that such-and-such a thing, which is revealed in Scripture, cannot be true, because it is inconsistent with the modern idea of the benevolence of God. Our only answer to the caviller is, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

8, 9. *It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.*

God is incomprehensible by any finite mind; and he is omnipotent, too.

10. *If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him?*

If he sees fit to destroy men, or for a while to make them prisoners; or if he pleases to gather them together, and multiply them like the hosts of heaven, who can hinder him?

11. *For he knoweth vain men he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?*

Wickedness hidden under the veil of night, God sees as clearly as in the blaze of noon. Wickedness which never comes out of the heart, but tarries

there, and does not lead into overt action, God sees it: "Will he not then consider it?" Of course he will.

12. *For vain man—*

That is just what man is by nature; the best of men are vanity—emptiness: "For vain man"—

12. *Would be wise,—*

He pretends to wisdom; he wishes to be thought wise; he likes to wear a wise man's title: "Vain man would be wise,"—

12. *Though man be born like a wild ass's colt.*

As untamed, as ignorant, as wilful as a wild ass's colt, are we by nature. Zophar seems to think that he has sufficiently rebuked Job for pretending to be wise, and for complaining that God was dealing unjustly with him; so now he begins to admonish him to repent:—

13—18. *If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away: and thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety.*

It is a great mercy when God enables men to pursue their daily callings, and to take their nightly rest in safety; and it is a still greater mercy when they feel secure, whether they live or die, because they have a good hope concerning the hereafter. It is an unspeakable blessing when sin is washed away, and a man can lift up his face to God without spot, and walk in the light of Jehovah's countenance all the day long.

19, 20. *Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail,—*

Carefully notice this very solemn prophecy,—the eyes that have looked upon sin with pleasure,—the eyes that have flashed with lascivious desire,—the eyes that have dared to look towards God with defiance or derision,—"the eyes of the wicked shall fail,"—

20. *And they shall not escape,—*

To what place could they escape from God, when he is everywhere? During the days when the Roman empire extended all over the world, people said that the whole earth was one great prison for Cæsar's enemies; and the universe itself is a vast prison for those who are condemned of God. Where shall they go to avoid arrest? Whither shall they fly to get beyond God's reach? They cannot escape anywhere. There is neither hole nor corner, even in the bowels of the mountains, or in the flinty hearts of the rocks, where a sinner can hide himself from the hand of God: "They shall not escape,"—

20. *And their hope—*

The last thing that ever dies, "their hope"—

20. *Shall be as the giving up of the ghost.*

Like death itself, their hope shall be. Then, if "their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost," what hope is there for them? Let us not have our portion with them, else we shall be as hopeless as they are.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—30, 595, 683; AND FROM "FLOWERS AND FRUITS"—14.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SPIRITUAL RELIGION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 3RD, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, early in the year 1858.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."—John vi. 63.

To a casual reader, it looks as if the meaning of this passage lay upon the very surface; but he who has studied the chapter carefully has discovered that it is a sentence replete with many difficulties as to the exact interpretation of it. I shall not, however, waste your time by entering into any critical discussion of it; but shall only try to give you simply what I believe to be the mind of the Spirit, as uttered by the lips of Jesus in this passage; and after I have done that, I shall then revert to what I shall call the meaning which any person would give to it who is not a diligent and careful student of Scripture. That meaning being true, although not the special truth taught in this passage, I shall briefly enlarge upon it.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." I suppose there is not a man in the world who could form any intelligent idea of what a spirit is. It is very easy for persons to define a spirit by saying what it is not; but I query whether there is, or ever could be, any man who could form any idea of what it is. We sometimes talk about seeing a spirit; ignorant persons in ages gone by, and some living now in benighted villages, talk about seeing spirits by night. They must know that such talk is a contradiction. Matter can be seen; but a spirit, if it clothed itself in any light substance, could not even then be seen; it would only be the substance that would be visible. The spirit itself is a thing which can neither be tasted, handled, seen, nor discerned in any way whatever by our senses; for if it could be thus perceived, there would then be proof positive that it was not a spirit at all, but that it belonged to the material realm. We divide all things into matter and spirit; and whatsoever can be recognized by the senses, in any way, is matter, depend on it. Spirit is itself a thing too subtile to be either seen or in any other way perceived by the senses, so I repeat what

I said just now, that I suppose there is no man living, and that there never will be any man in this mortal state, who will be able accurately to define a spirit so as to say what it is, though he may be able to say what it is not.

Now, there is a region where there are spirits dwelling without any bodies being connected with them. It is certain that, in the world to come, in that state which now intervenes between the death of the saints and the day of the resurrection, they are dwelling before the throne of God in a disembodied state,—pure spirits, without any corporeal form whatever. It is quite certain that the saints before the throne have no semblance of bodily shape whatever. They are pure spirits, beings whose substance we cannot imagine; purely immaterial, as they are also immaculate. But, on earth, you can find no such thing as a pure spirit. We are all spirits in bodies; and, somehow, from the fact that, wherever we find souls and spirits, they are always found in bodies, we are very apt to confound bodies and spirits together. But let us always understand that bodies and spirits are distinct things; and though it hath pleased God, in this world, never to make a spirit without making a house for it to dwell in, called the body, yet the body is not the spirit. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

You will easily perceive the truth of this passage if you will recollect that, in man's body, no one can tell where the life is situated. In vain the surgeon lays the body on the table, and dissects it; he will find life neither in the brain nor in the heart; he may cut the body in pieces as he pleases, but he will not find anything that he can lay hold upon tangibly and really, and say, "That is life." He can see all the effects and evidences of life, he can watch the various parts of the body moving, he can behold all the appearances of life which are caused by a supernatural something; but life he cannot see. That is altogether beyond his ken; and after all his searching, he must lay down his scalpel, and say at once, "There now, the task is all over; there is a spirit that quickeneth this body, but in my search after life this flesh profiteth me nothing. I might as well search for a soul within a stone, or within one of the pillars that support this house, as search for a soul within mere flesh and blood if I look for something which I can see, which I can lay hold of, or which, by either taste, sight, smelling, or any other sense, I can distinguish and can designate as being a spirit."

So, brethren, this illustration just brings me to the truth that is taught in our text. We are here assembled, at this moment, spirits, souls. Here we are also, bodies; but these bodies are not ourselves; they are the houses in which we live. I question whether there is any man who can define what he is himself; the most that any man can say is, "I am; I know I have an existence; but what kind of thing my spirit is, I do not know, I cannot tell; I have no knowledge of what it is. I feel it; I know it moves my body; I feel its outward manifestations; I am certain of my existence; but what I am, I know not; God alone can say." "I AM THAT I AM," is comprehensible only to God himself; but man is a being

incomprehensible to himself; and though the Lord may allow him to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am," he cannot tell what he really is, he cannot fully comprehend his own existence.

Understand, then, that, as in our being there is a mystery in our flesh, so religion, the true religion of the blessed God, in order to be made like unto us, and to be a something suitable to us, must be a religion of spirit; but, because we also have a body, it must have a body in which to clothe itself. I want, if I can, to make this plain to you; and if you do not understand it now, I hope you will before I have done. We are spirits in bodies. Well, then, in order to meet our cases, the great work of God in us must be a spiritual thing; but in order that I may be able to talk about it to you, and that you may be able to hear it with your ears, that spiritual thing must be encased in a body; or else, if it were a purely spiritual thing, I could not explain it to you, any more than I could explain to you about a spirit, if there were no body in which a spirit could be found, and no body in which I could be able to live to talk about it. I want to show you this truth very clearly, because there are some persons who are so busy about that which concerns merely the body of religion that they altogether forget that religion has also a spirit. I believe that what our Lord Jesus meant in this passage was, "The mere embodiment of religion profiteth nothing; it is the spirit that quickeneth." Just as, to use my figure over again, in order to perform an act, the mere flesh and blood and arms and legs profit nothing, it is the spirit that quickens all the bones, and makes the nerves act as they ought to do, and the sinews work as they should, so religion has its outward form, it has its ceremonies, it has its external and visible developments,—its body,—but the mere outward body of religion is of no use whatever, except the inward and invisible spirit quickeneth it.

I. To begin, then, I WILL FIRST SHOW YOU THIS TRUTH AS OUR SAVIOUR, I THINK, MEANT IT WHEN HE FIRST OF ALL STATED IT.

There were some people, in our Saviour's day, who admired Christ merely as a man, and they thought there was some marvellous efficacy in his flesh and blood. To them he said, using almost the very words of our text, "Even my flesh will profit you nothing; it is the spirit that quickens." I must state this truth very cautiously, yet very plainly. When our Saviour was upon this earth, there were some, I repeat, who admired his person. You remember how our Saviour rebuked the woman who said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which gave thee suck." He would not have people simply admire his flesh, and think so much of his mere humanity, so he said to her, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it."

There were some other people, who wanted to take the Lord Jesus, and make him a king; but, in effect, he said to them, "My flesh, even if you exalt it to a throne, will profit you nothing. I did not come here that you might bow down and venerate my mere flesh, that you might think the mere admiration of my mortal frame is vital religion. It is the spirit, the gospel that I came to preach, that will benefit you. It is not these outward appearances; it is

my thoughts, and words, and acts, which are to bless you." Hear what the Saviour says in the next sentence, "It is not your admiration of my flesh that is of any use to you, for my flesh profits nothing; it is the spirit that quickens; and if you want to know what is the spirit of my incarnation, I tell you that the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. It is not your venerating my flesh and blood, it is your reception of my doctrines that will be the heart and soul of the religion that I desire you to possess."

Our Saviour was, however, led to make these remarks from the fact that the ignorant Jews, when he talked about eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, really thought that he meant that they were to turn cannibals, and eat him up. You may well smile at so ridiculous an idea; yet you know that the idea is still prevalent in the Church of Rome. The Romish priest solemnly assures us that the people who eat the bread and drink the wine, or the stuff he calls bread and wine, do actually act the part of cannibals, and eat the body of Christ, and drink his blood. You say to him, "You mean, my dear sir, that they do it in a figure, spiritually." "No," he says, "I do not; I mean to say that, after I have pronounced certain words over that bread, it becomes Christ's flesh; and after I have said a certain prayer over that wine, it becomes his actual blood." "Well," we reply to him, "it is very singular, and you certainly cannot expect us to believe you, whilst God allows our heads to be occupied by brains; but even if we do believe you, my dear sir, we refer you to this passage, which says, 'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.' You tell the people that they do actually and really receive the body and blood of Christ. Suppose they do, it is no earthly use to them; and even if they could carnally bite the flesh with their teeth, and drink the blood down their throats, it would be of no more use to them than the eating of the flesh and blood of any other man. It could be of no service whatever to them, for Christ himself denounces the error of transubstantiation, and declares that even his flesh profiteth nothing. It is only the spirit, the spiritual receiving of that flesh and blood, that can be of any avail whatsoever."

While I am referring to this point, allow me just to say a few more words upon it, for Popery prevails in this day, and the doctrine that the bread and wine are turned into the body and blood of Christ is the bulwark of Popery. Dr. Carson, of Coleraine, son of Dr. Carson, the eminent Baptist, has settled off Dr. Cahill in a remarkable way. He has challenged Dr. Cahill to prove that he can turn the bread and wine used in the sacrament into Christ's body and blood. He offers to give Dr. Cahill a hundred pounds if he will let him make a wafer for him, and if Dr. Cahill will then put it on his own tongue, and swallow it in Mr. Carson's own presence, "if the Doctor is not dead in an hour," says Dr. Carson, "I'll give him a hundred pounds." "No," says someone, "that is not fair." "Oh! but if he can turn it into the body and blood of Christ, it cannot hurt him, whatever it may contain." "But would you make it of poison, then?" "Yes, the deadliest I could find."

"Would you give him poison?" "I should not give it to him; he would swallow it himself; he would do it of his own voluntary choice." Of course, Dr. Cahill will not submit to that test; he knows that he cannot turn the wafer and the wine into the body and blood of Christ; if he could, Dr. Carson says it would not hurt him, for the body and blood of Christ would poison no one.

But some wise Romanist says, "That is not a fair test; Dr. Cahill does not pretend to turn poison into the body and blood of Christ; it is only pure bread and wine that can thus be manipulated." "Very well," says Dr. Carson, "I'll try him another way. I will let him choose a youth from seven or eight Catholic boys; he shall take a quart of wine, and turn this wine in his own peculiar way into the blood of Christ. The boy shall drink the quart of wine, and if he is not drunk in six hours, I will pay the hundred pounds." "Now," says Dr. Carson, "if that liquid is really the blood of Christ, it will not make him drunk; he might drink a hogshead of it, and it would not make him intoxicated." But Dr. Cahill dare not come to such a trial as that; for it would very soon be found that the so-called "consecrated" wine would make the boy intoxicated as quickly as any other wine would; therefore, it could not have been turned, even by the great Doctor himself, into the blood of Christ.

The fact is, the lie is so palpable, the delusion is so absurd, that any child, of a reasonable age, would as soon think of believing the cock and bull story which we used to read in our childish days, about what the bull said, and what the cock said, to be actual truth, as to imagine it to be a literal fact that any priest, or any man in the world, could ever turn bread and wine into flesh and blood. But even if they could, hear again the words of our text: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." So, then, after all, the Roman Catholic sacrament, if it be actually a cannibal's feast upon the body and blood of Christ, is of no earthly use; but that divinely-appointed ordinance wherein we do spiritually receive the flesh and blood of Jesus, and in a spiritual way hold communion with him, is that alone which quickeneth.

This brings me to the truth that I want you, dear friends, specially to understand. As Christ Jesus in his flesh was the embodiment of his own doctrine, and yet not his flesh, but the spirit of his doctrine quickeneth souls, so the outward forms and ceremonies, which Christ has made to be the body to contain the spirit of his truth, are of no earthly use at all unless the Spirit of God be in them.

Take, for instance, the ordinance of believers' baptism; there are the pool and the water; that pool and that water are, so to speak, the flesh and blood of dedication; the right observance of that holy ordinance signifies that we do solemnly devote ourselves to the Lord Jesus. Suppose, however, our hearts are in a wrong condition, or that we are not converted persons;—suppose there is no influence of the Spirit resting upon us during the act of baptism, then the act of baptism is like the flesh apart from the spirit, it is a dead thing, it profiteth nothing, because it is without the soul. We come, the next Sabbath, to the Lord's table: there is the bread

broken by God's servant, there is the wine reverently handed round by the deacons of the church, and it is sipped by the communicants; but, mark you, however devoutly the whole service is performed, except the Spirit of the living God breathes through the divine ordinance, "the flesh"—that is, the mere embodiment of communion,—will profit you nothing. You might sit at a thousand communion tables, and you might be baptized in a myriad pools; but all this would not avail one jot or tittle for your salvation, unless you had the Spirit of God to quicken you.

Nay, to go further, it is not these two outward ordinances only that need the Spirit in them; it is so in everything else. You have sometimes read, dear friends, of some eminent Christians who grew to have much fellowship with Christ by prayer. Perhaps you imbibed the idea that, if you were to go home, and spend as many hours in your closet as they did, you would get as much profit by it; and not thinking about the Holy Spirit, you simply devote yourself to private prayer as you might to any manual exercise, with a hope of profiting by the exercise alone. I tell you, you might be on your knees till your knees were worn bare, and you might be in your closet till the steam of your devotion ran down the walls; but unless the Spirit of the Lord was in that closet with you, the mere fleshly exercise of praying would no more avail and profit you than if you had been chanting songs to the moon, or standing in the street to sell your goods.

Another hears that a certain person has been very much blessed by reading a text of Scripture. "Oh!" says he, "has that text been blessed to such an one? Then, I'll go, and read the same passage, too." You think that, if you do the same as he does, you will be equally blessed; and you are marvellously surprised that, when you read the passage, it does you no good. It made his spirit leap for joy, it filled his soul with the wine of the kingdom; but to you it is like a dry well, or an empty bottle. Why is this? The mere letter, in which the promise is revealed, profiteth you nothing; it is the spirit of the promise, it is the life of the Holy Spirit running through the veins of the promise, that alone can profit you. You hear that another man meditates on God's law day and night, and becomes like a tree planted by the rivers of water. You say, "I will take care that, every morning, I will read a chapter out of the Scriptures; and that, every night, I will read two chapters." There are certain people who think that, if they read a good passage out of the Bible, they have done a great deal. In that kind of spirit, they might just as well read a portion out of Hudibras; for they just read it straight through, without thinking of understanding it.

Many of our ministers think that, in the public service, they must read a certain quantity of the Scriptures; and they take, perhaps, three long chapters out of Ezekiel, and not a soul in the congregation knows the meaning of what they are reading. If they were to read a Dutch sermon in an English chapel, it would do the hearers just about as much good, for no one understands what they read. Instead of reading, as Ezra did, and expounding the meaning to the people, they must go on over hedge and ditch,—one continual

steeple-chase! Instead of stopping to crack the shells, and give the kernels of truth to the people, they read right on, without attempting to give any explanation of the passage. To such persons, we would simply say, "Your Bible-reading is but the flesh, it is of no use to you, 'it is the spirit that quickeneth;' the mere flesh, the outward fashion and form of Bible-reading will not profit anybody. One sentence of the Bible prayed over, and bedewed with the Spirit, and made alive, though it be only a short sentence of six words, will profit you more than a hundred chapters without the Spirit, because they are 'flesh'—dead; but the one verse with the Spirit is the thing that quickeneth."

I do not know whether I have as yet brought out the full meaning of the text; but I want to let everyone understand that it is not the mere outward embodiment of our religion that saves the soul, and that profits us; it is the inner spirit of the thing that does us good. Mark, I would not find fault with any of these forms, any more than I would find fault with our bodies, because they are not spirits; our bodies are good things for our spirits to live in; and the forms of religion are good things for the spirit of religion to live in; but the form without the spirit, though it be the most decorous, and apparently the most devout that can be presented to God, can be of no use for our soul's eternal profit and ultimate salvation. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

Now, my dear friend, Mr. So-and-so, if you will just take out your pencil, and cast up your accounts for all the years of your life, the sum of them all will come to very little, if what I say be true. "I think," you say, "I am a tolerably good sort of man; I have a few faults, but just look at what I have done. I have been to chapel twice every Sunday almost since I was a boy,—I don't know that I missed once, except when I was ill; that has been very good of me, and no mistake. I always read the Bible every morning; I always have family prayer; that is very good of me; another item to be reckoned to my account. I say my prayers when I go to bed at night, and when I get up in the morning; I very frequently go to prayer-meetings; I don't think anyone can reasonably find fault with me; really, I think I do everything to make me a truly religious man." Ah! and did you put at the end of it, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, unjust, extortioners," and so on, or even like that poor fellow, a Sabbath-breaker, whom you saw going the opposite way as you were coming to your usual place of worship? It is a pity you didn't finish it up in that fashion; but if you did not in words, you finished it up so in your heart. But I pray God to show you that all these beautiful things of yours are good for nothing. There are your chapel-goings,—all flesh; there are your Bible-readings,—all flesh; there are your family prayers,—all flesh; there are your good works and excellences,—all flesh. You have never received the Spirit of the living God; you dare not say that you have. Well, then, all these things will profit you nothing whatsoever.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth," you know, my dear sir,—and

let me speak very pointedly,—you know that you never enter into the spirit of the things of which you have been speaking. Though you go to your church or chapel regularly, yet you know that you might very often just as well be at home; for when the worshippers sing, you do not sing with all your heart; and when the minister preaches, it is seldom there is much that touches you, unless it is what you call "a good intellectual discourse," which happens to please you, and you believe it, just because it meets your views. You know that, into the inward soul, and marrow, and bowels of devotion, you have never yet learned to penetrate. Your devotion is like a certain ox, which was slain as a sacrifice in the time of siege in Rome, and was said to portend evil because, when the augur slew it, he declared that he could not find a heart anywhere. He looked through all the entrails, but no heart could he discover; and hence, the Romans declared that their city must be destroyed. It was an omen of ill fortune, they said, when the sacrifice had no heart in it. It is just the same with you. You have done all these things, and there has been as much reality in what you have done as there was devotion in the poor Kalmuck's windmill, when he tied the prayer to it, and put it up in the garden, and every time it blew round, he counted that was just one more prayer. There was as much heart in your prayer as there was in his windmill; that is to say, none at all. Go on no longer with this useless round of performances, I implore you. I would not have you give up the performances; but seek the spirit that can make them true and acceptable in God's sight. Stop awhile, and ask God to give you that inward spirit that quickeneth, for that is what is needed: "the flesh profiteth nothing."

But I must speak also to you who are the children of God, and I must ask you,—How often do you forget this all-important truth? I know it is not likely that I would leave my chamber any morning, without prayer; but, oh, brethren, I have often left it without having the spirit of prayer! I should not like to pass a day without reading the Scriptures, but I am afraid it is very often the mere "flesh" of formal reading, and not the spirit breathing in the Word. And how often is our conscience satisfied with the mere form without the spirit! Now, if we were what we ought to be, we should never be content with the form, unless we could also see the spirit in it.

Mother, would you be content to have at home a child who was dead? Suppose someone should say to you, "Why, this child is just as good a child as ever it was! Look at it! It has not lost a leg, or an arm, or any part of its body!" "Ah, but," you would say, "it is dead." "Oh!" says one, "there is no great difference; it looks as beautiful now as ever it did." "Ah!" says the poor mother, "but there is a vast deal of difference between what it was when it was alive, and what it is now it is dead." Just transfer that idea to your poor dead prayers, and your poor dead Bible-readings, and your poor dead sacraments, and your poor dead goings to chapel, and all that! Ah! how many of our sacrifices are just poor dead

things, when we bring them to the Lord! They have died in the night, and then we come and offer them before God! How frequently do we satisfy our conscience with having "the flesh"—the embodiment of the sacrifice, and yet, all the while, we forget the spirit! But let us remember that God only looks for the life. He does not trouble about the body; and we ought, in all we do for him, to take care, first of all, that the spirit is there, and then we may rest quite sure that the flesh and blood of the devotion will take care of themselves.

II. This, I believe, is the true meaning of the passage. But the common rendering of it, if anyone reads it without noticing the context, would be, "Why, that means, 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth;' that is to say, 'IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT QUICKENETH; THE FLESH PROFITETH NOTHING.'"

Our friend will excuse me when I say that it cannot mean that; you notice that the "s" in the word "spirit" in the text has not a capital letter. If it meant the Holy Spirit, it would be so marked, to separate it from the spirit to which I have just referred, —the inward spirit, the life of a thing. This word "spirit" here does not mean the Holy Spirit; still, almost every ordinary reader would make that mistake, and say, "It is the Holy Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." Well, it is a mistake that will not do him any hurt, because, if it does not say so here, it does say so somewhere else; and if it is not true in this one particular text, it is true all over the Bible, and it is true in a Christian's experience, so that a man may make a great many worse mistakes than that. Well, then, let us for once make that mistake, and then let us get the truth out of it: "It is the Holy Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

"Can aught beneath a power divine
The stubborn will subdue?
'Tis thine, Eternal Spirit, thine
To form the heart anew.

'Tis thine the passions to recall,
And upwards bid them rise;
And make the scales of error fall
From reason's darken'd eyes.

To chase the shades of death away,
And bid the sinner live;
A beam of heaven, a vital ray,
'Tis thine alone to give."

How often have I thought, when I have been preaching, "There is a young woman in the gallery, and down there in the area is a young man; how interested they look during the sermon!" I have met with them, I have admired their characters; they have had an amiable carriage and deportment; there has been much in them that everybody would tell others to imitate and emulate. I have said, "Ah! I shall soon have them added to the church; there is so much that is good about them, it will be such an easy transition for them, they are so moral and so excellent, it will be very easy for them

surely to take a step into the kingdom of heaven." I don't say that I have said so much as that in words to my heart; but that has been about what I have thought. Well, there has been a very different sort of fellow, a queer-looking object certainly, who came running into the chapel, one Thursday evening, towards the end of the service; not even washed, nor in any way prepared for divine worship; he only just came to hear something that would make him laugh, as he thought. I did not expect to have him converted; but the next time I sat to see enquirers, in he came,—cleaned and brushed up,—but I recognized him, for all that, and I said to him, "Didn't you come into the chapel, one Thursday night, after you had been hammering and tinkering away somewhere? I thought you looked a strange customer, certainly." "Yes," said he, "and the Lord met with me that night."

Now, I sat many and many a time to see enquirers, but I did not see the young man or the young woman come. Why was this? The Lord meant to teach his servant that "the flesh profiteth nothing." That man seemed to me far from God, and that young man and that young woman seemed very near. But the Lord said to me, "I will just let you learn that all their morality and all their goodness did not put them near the kingdom of heaven, or help towards their salvation. I could save one as well as the other; and if I chose to show my sovereignty, I might even let publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of heaven before those who, becoming proud of their morality, would not stoop before me." Have you not, sometimes, met with a person of such a peculiar character that you have said, "Is it not a pity someone cannot talk with that man?" I often have notes of this sort. A father writes to me, "I wish you could get hold of my son; he is a very interesting young man; if you were to put the truth before him to suit his turn of mind, he would be sure to lay hold of it, for if you knew how he was mentally constituted, you would say at once there was a peculiar adaptation in his mind for the reception of the gospel." Well, I have been told that a dozen times; but I never found it true even once. "The flesh profiteth nothing." No peculiar adaptation of mind is any more susceptible of gospel influences than another. Dead sinners are all dead, and all dead alike. Some may be black, and some may be white; some may be well washed and dressed, and some may have all the mire and filth of sensuality about them; but they are all dead alike; and when converting grace comes to deal with them, it finds as much for its exercise in the one case as in the other; it finds as much to help it in the one heart as in the other,—that is to say, it finds nothing to help it at all. It brings all that is helpful within itself; it kindles its own fire with its own torch, it blows the fire with its own breath, and asks for nothing in the sinner, be he who he may.

Then, again, we have sometimes said, "If such-and-such a man were converted, dear me, what a shining Christian he would make! He is a man of brilliant talents, of great intellectual power, and of extensive fortune. Oh, if he were but converted, what a jubilee it would be to the Church of God! How much he would do for

Christ!" Well, do you know, I have always found out that these fine people, who, when they were converted, were to be something extraordinary, if they have been converted, and we have got them, have not turned out to be quite so great after all! I knew a minister once, who, with great joy and gladness, baptized a man. It was on a New-year's day, and I remember with what self-congratulation he said, "The Lord has sent me one of the best New-year's gifts I ever had;" and he looked upon that man, and said, "Ah! this *is* a brother; he is a great gain to the church; he is a man of such active spirit, of such an excellent turn of mind, and he is everything that could be desired." Well, I have just happened to live long enough to see that man rend the church in sunder, and drive the minister out of his pulpit, and he is alive still, a thorn in the side of that church, and a huge prickly bramble that they would be glad enough to eradicate, but they have scarcely power enough to do that. No; the Lord will show us that "the flesh profiteth nothing." "You may have him," says the Lord, "if he is such a fine fellow; take him, you will find he will not be much good to you, after all. I will let you know that 'the flesh profiteth nothing:' 'it is the spirit' alone 'that quickeneth.'"

On the other hand, we have seen some come whose "flesh" could not help them. They were the poor, the mean, the illiterate, the despised; and we have seen the grace of God blaze up in their hearts to an intense degree of fervour, and we have seen them stand confident and strong, notwithstanding the nothingness of the flesh; and then we have said, "Verily, O God, it is marvellous how, when the flesh is weak, thy grace is strong;" and we have heard an answer from "the excellent glory," which said, "Ah! the flesh profiteth nothing: it is the spirit that quickeneth."

Now, I do not believe that there is any form of our flesh, nor any act of our flesh, nor anything that our flesh can do, or attempt to do, or think of, or suggest, that can in any way assist in the great spiritual work of our salvation. It is the Spirit alone that quickeneth; and you will find, till you die, that "the flesh profiteth nothing," and profiteth no one, except the devil, and it often profits him; but in God's ways, and in God's holy gospel, you will always find the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. You will have to feel this truth, that the flesh at its best estate profiteth nothing. "It is the spirit that quickeneth."

Now, my brother, or my sister, in conclusion, I will ask thee this question,—Hast thou received the influences of the Holy Spirit? and have those influences led thee to worship God, who is a Spirit, "in spirit and in truth"? For, if not, though some may put thee in the cradle of ceremonies, and rock thee to sleep, I will not be one of them. Although men may tell thee thou art right enough because thou art outwardly so religious, because thou art no Sabbath-breaker, no swearer, no drunkard, I warn thee that, unless thou art born again from above, thou canst not see the kingdom of God; and when drunkards, and harlots, and all manner of ungodly persons, shall be driven from the presence of God, you also shall share their fate, for you are dead in trespasses and sins, even as they

are. If you would ever enter heaven, you must be quickened by the Holy Spirit. No more shall I say, but earnestly entreat the Spirit of the blessed God to impress upon your hearts this solemn thought, and lead you to renounce the works of the flesh, and put your trust in him "who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." May the Lord's mercy rest upon you all, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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THE LESSON OF THE ALMOND TREE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 10TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, April 7th, 1881.

"Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it."—Jeremiah i. 11, 12.

OBSERVE, first, dear friends, that before Jeremiah becomes a speaker for God, he must be a seer. The name for a prophet, in the olden time, was a "seer",—a man who could see, one who could see with his mind's eye, one who could also see with spiritual insight, so as vividly to realize the truth which he had to deliver in the name of the Lord. Learn that simple lesson well, O you who try to speak for God! You must be seers before you can be speakers.

The question with which God usually begins his conversation with each of his true servants is the one he addressed to Jeremiah, "What seest thou?" I am afraid that there are some ministers, nowadays, who do not see much. Judging by what they preach, their vision must be all in cloudland, where all they see is smoke, and mist, and fog. I often meet with persons who have attended the same ministry for years; and when I have asked them even very simple questions about the things of God, I have found that they do not know anything. It was not because they were not able to comprehend quickly when the truth was set forth plainly before them; but I fear that it was, in most cases, because there was nothing that they could learn from the minister to whom they had been accustomed to listen. The preacher had seen nothing; and, therefore, when he described what he saw, of course it all amounted to nothing. No, my brother, before you can make an impression upon another person's heart, you must have an impression made upon your own soul. You must be able to say, concerning the truth, "I see it," before you can speak it so that your hearers also shall see it. It must be clear to your own mind, by the spiritual perception which accompanies true faith, or else you will not be able to say with the psalmist, "I believed, therefore have I spoken."

Let me say over again that sentence which I uttered a minute ago, —the speaker for God must first be a seer in the light of God.

And, next, the true speaker for God must see what God sets before him. In this case, the Lord had set before Jeremiah's eye "a rod of an almond tree." We might have thought that, as a preparation for his prophetical work, he would have seen mysterious wheels full of eyes, or flaming seraphs and cherubs, or the wonderful creatures that were caused to appear in the dreams of Ezekiel and the revelation to John. Instead of this, Jeremiah simply sees "a rod of an almond tree;" and, beloved friends, when you look into the Bible, you will see some very simple things there,—such things as save little children's souls,—such things as men with no education can understand and believe. Be not anxious to be numbered among those who are so "eclectic" and "cultured" that, if God sets before them the rod of an almond tree, they cannot condescend to notice it. That is something which everybody can see, so why should such remarkable eyes as theirs behold the plain things which ordinary individuals can perceive? They want to see—I scarcely know what they do want to see, except their own foolish dreams, and even those are hidden from them. God give us grace to see rods of almond trees when he sets them before us;—I mean, may he give us grace to see such simple truths as these: "Ye must be born again." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." What seest thou, my friend? Dost thou see what God would have thee see, what he has put before thee in his Word? If so, I may say to thee what the Lord said to Jeremiah, "Thou hast well seen;" but if not, however gorgeous the panorama or pageant which thou hast invented for thyself to behold, thou hadst better be blind, for thou wilt only be following some will-o'-the-wisp, that may amuse for a while, but will ultimately destroy the souls of men.

Further, those who would speak aright for God must also take care to see with all their eyes. I do not suppose that everybody here, who had seen the vision of a rod, would have known it to be "a rod of an almond tree." I do not imagine that I should, though I think I should readily know a rod if it were made of olive wood, or orange wood, having become familiar with them during my visits to the South of France. But I do not know that I should, in a moment, be able to say of a certain rod, "That is the rod of an almond tree." But Jeremiah understood these things; and, therefore, as soon as he saw what was set before him, he did not merely say, "I see a rod," but "I see a rod of an almond tree." He distinguished at once the kind of rod that was revealed to him in vision, for he was a man who had those powers of discernment and discrimination which are most needful in the Lord's servants; and if you, dear friend, are called to teach the children in the Sunday-school, or if you try to win souls by private conversation, or if you are a preacher of the Word, blessed are you if you can see below the surface of the truth, and can peer into its hidden depths of meaning, and get a spiritual insight into the Word of God so that

you do not merely see a small portion of the Scriptures, but you perceive a far larger part than most people do. You should, if you can, see it all. I can hardly think that many years of spiritual education and divine training would be required for you to attain to that position;—at any rate, to see all that is needful for the due discharge of your ministry, all that may help you to know the meaning of the truth, and to bring it out for real, practical use among those to whom you seek to be made a blessing. O seer, ask to have clear eyes! Speaker, recollect that your speaking must begin with your eyes; and,—though it may seem a strange thing to say so,—the first education for the true servant of God does not concern his tongue so much as his eyes. "What seest thou?" Seek to be able to see all that thou canst see; and take care that thou dost not miss anything through inadvertence or neglect. "Search the Scriptures." Be thou one of those who gaze into the truth, as the angels desire to look into it, so that, when thou seest the vision, thou shalt be able to say, with Jeremiah, "I see a rod of an almond tree."

Next, the servant of the Lord must seek to win the approval of his Master as Jeremiah did. It will be a grand thing for you, dear brothers and sisters who try to speak to others, if you should receive such praise as God so freely gave to Jeremiah, at the very first moment of his ministry, when he said to him, "Thou hast well seen." Thou shalt well speak, if thou hast well seen. O my dear young brethren in the College, you who are here to-night, I hope that it will be true of you, whenever you think of the doctrine of human depravity, that you have looked into your own hearts, and seen the evil of your own nature till you have wept over it! So shall it be said to each one of you, "Thou hast well seen that." I hope that you will so clearly see the truth of the Fall that you will recognize the evil that comes of it, and the evil that abides in the corrupt nature of man. And then may you get such a sight of the cross,—such a clear view of the atoning blood, and understand so fully the great doctrine of substitution and the divine plan of reconciliation, that God may be able to say to you, "Thou hast well seen." A want of distinctness in our understanding of the truth will lead to a want of distinctness in our utterance of it. Oh, to have eyes like those of the Heavenly Bridegroom, of whom his spouse said, "His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set," for, in his turn, he says to his bride, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou are fair; thou hast doves' eyes." The ministers of the Church of Christ, who have to a great extent to be her seers, need to have clear, far-seeing, and pure-seeing eyes. May God grant us the power distinctly to trace his wondrous grace from the eternal fountain of electing love, along the streams of never-ceasing mercy which bring final perseverance to the saints, right onward to the coming of our Lord, and the blessed uprising of all his Church to be with him in his glory for ever and ever! Ere you venture to tell anything of the gospel message to others, you need to hear the Lord say to you, as he said to Jeremiah, "Thou hast well seen."

For this purpose it will be necessary that your eyes should be enlightened. What an appropriate prayer is that for you Sunday-school teachers and Christian ministers to offer, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"! I think that, if I had, as a preacher, to make only one request to my Master, and he asked me, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"—I should reply, "Lord, that I may receive my sight more fully than ever, and see thy truth more clearly than ever," because there is no fear about our speaking for God if our seeing is what it should be. That is the main matter, and therefore the Lord asks each one of us, "What seest thou?" If our answer proves that we have well seen, it is because the Spirit of God has enlightened us; and, enlightenment from God having been once received, we shall tell to others right gladly what God has revealed to us.

Yet once more, those who see what they can see, and take care to see it well, are the people who shall receive further instruction, for it was when Jeremiah said, "I see a rod of an almond tree," that the Lord went on to explain the vision to him, saying, "Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it." Those who do not see what they can see shall not be allowed to see any more. If you will not use, in diligently studying the Scriptures, the judgment and perception which you already have, God will not give you further light, since you neglect the gift that is in you. He will leave your fire to burn low because you do not stir it up, and it shall get to be more dim than it now is, for he who will not learn more when God is willing to teach him shall forget what he already knows. I charge you, who are called to teach others in any way whatsoever, to submit yourselves fully to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. A disciple is the only person who can become an apostle; a scholar in the school of Christ is the only one who can be sent out to tell to others what his Master wishes to have made known to the sons of men.

I have spoken thus with the view of helping those who are working for Christ; but now I must try to explain the vision mentioned in our text: "Jeremiah, what seest thou?" "I see a rod of an almond tree."

I. Observe, first, that THE ALMOND IS A WAKEFUL TREE. The Hebrew word which is rendered "almond" comes from a root signifying to be wakeful, so this passage might be read thus, "I see the wakeful rod. Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will waken concerning my word to perform it."

When the other trees are asleep, before the warmth of the spring-time has aroused them from their winter slumbers, the almond tree awakes, and opens the lovely eyes of its abundant blossoms. In Jeremiah's country, it begins to bloom early in January, and it is in such haste to produce its fruit that it is often ripe before the end of March. You know how, even in our suburban gardens, one of the first signs of the approach of spring is that the almond tree begins to blossom. The East wind often keeps it back, yet it struggles to its utmost to come out while other trees are asleep. Even before the chestnut, which is generally up as early as almost

any of our trees, has been able to cast off the blankets in which it slept during the winter, the almond tree has opened its eyes, and looked out as if it were asking whether springtime is not coming. The almond is a wakeful tree, and so, says the Lord, "I will be wakeful concerning my word to perform it."

Note, first, that *God never forgets a promise.* Alas! you and I do not remember all our promises. How often are they made only to be broken; but God never forgets one that he has given. We even forget God's promises; and, often, when we are in trouble, we can hardly recollect one that we can plead before him. But God never yet forgot a promise; all these centuries, in which he has been dealing with men, he has never yet failed to keep his word. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?"

What is equally wonderful, *God has never forgotten a single person to whom a promise belonged,*—not even the least. Even if they have only desired to seek him, or if they have only commenced to seek him, he has been gracious to them, he has heard their cry, and has delivered them. This is a wide world, and there are many millions of people in it; yet no one of them has ever been able to say that God has failed to keep one of his promises. More than that, in the whole universe, throughout all the ages, there has never been a forgotten soul. He who counts the brilliant stars counts such dim things as our understandings; and he who numbers the very hairs of our head never fails to reckon the cries of our hearts.

Further, *there has never been a single occasion for the fulfilment of a promise which God has allowed to slip.* When the promise has become due, he has discharged it to the tick of the clock. There are no dishonoured bills recorded against God in the archives of men or of angels. No one can look up to the heavens, and say to him, "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;" but we can say, "Faithful and true art thou, O Jehovah; this is part of thy Son's title, for he is the faithful and true Witness, and thou art the faithful Promiser, who always performs what he has promised." "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness."

Let me also add that *there is not a threatening of God's Word which has not been fulfilled,* or which will not yet be executed. He has been a wakeful God in that respect. When men have persisted in their iniquity, he has not allowed them to escape the just punishment of their evil deeds. Happily for us, we cannot hear the sighs and cries of the spirits shut up in prison; but they are there. In his mercy, God has made a great gulf between us and those who are tormented in that flame; but they are there, though we cannot see or hear them. As surely as God lives, their iniquity and transgression are already receiving their just recompence of reward, and there is a worse doom to follow. As God watches over his people to do them good, so does he watch over the transgressor who is finally impenitent, and makes him to know the terrors of his wrath. That is the black side of this truth, and it must not be ignored. You may rest assured that a judge who does not punish the guilty is as unjust as the one who does not acquit the innocent. There must

be, with every king who is worthy of the name, an execution of the sentence of the law upon evil-doers, as well as the award of praise for them that do well. Paul says, concerning the earthly representative of authority, "He beareth not the sword in vain;" and that sentence is certainly true concerning the King of kings. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Look, then, dear friends, at this rod of an almond tree, and believe in a wakeful God who will surely deal with men according to his Word, whether in promise or in threatening.

II. But the more obvious sense of the text is that which I give under the second head. THE ALMOND IS IN HASTE TO BLOSSOM AND BEAR FRUIT. Hence our translators have rendered the passage, "I will hasten my word to perform it." The almond tree is not slow to bloom, it is one of the very first trees to tell us that springtime is near. And the Lord is quick to fulfil his Word.

Very briefly, let me remind you of *the quickness of God to fulfil his threatenings.* Do you realize, dear hearers, you who are now hearing the gospel, but have not received it, that God's threatenings take effect at once? "No," you say, "'He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.'" That is most true; yet there is a sense in which his sentence takes effect at once. For instance, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." If you have heard the gospel,—and some of you have heard it many, many years,—and yet have not heeded it, you will not be condemned for the first time at the last great day, you are condemned even now. Some people say to us, "Why do you ministers, in your preaching, so constantly deal with another life, instead of dealing with this one?" Our answer is, that we do deal with this life; we deal with it continually, for we believe that both sides of that text are true at this very minute, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Even now, at this moment, while you are in this building, if you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the wrath of God is abiding on you.

Listen again. There is another immediate effect of the Word of the Lord, which follows as quickly as the blossom appears upon the almond tree. Upon some hearers, it produces an instant hardening. You remember how Paul wrote, "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." You, dear friends, are deriving, from every gospel sermon that you hear, either life unto life, or else death unto death. If you get no good from it, you will assuredly get harm. An unbelieving hearing of the gospel is a multiplication of curses to your soul,—another sermon for which you have to give account, another rejected exhortation recorded against you, another earnest invitation, which you have refused, and for which you will be held responsible. You are heaping up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath even while you hear the Word of the

Lord. I am not now talking about what will happen to you when you die, or when you rise for the final judgment; I am speaking about what is happening now. The same sun which melts wax hardens clay; and the same gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins. Take heed that you do not soon see the almond tree blossom in this terrible sense.

There is also another sense in which a definite result is speedily coming, for you must soon die, unless Christ comes shortly. In any case, it cannot be long before some here will be gone. We who have reached middle life must not reckon on continuing to live for many years; but others are already bald with age, or their hair is grey, so they must soon die. Suppose, however, that you young people should live to be ninety; yet how soon that period will be ended! Years seem to spin round, especially as we grow older. I thought, when I was a boy, that a year was a very long time; but, now, one scarcely seems to have time to kiss his hand before it is Christmas day again. People say, "Christmas is coming," as if it were a long way off; but the next one is coming as soon as the last one has gone. Time flies very rapidly as years advance upon us; it appears even to quicken its pace, though it does not really go any faster than it used to do. It will be but a short while, and you, my dear hearer, if you die without Christ, will find that God is not slack concerning his threatening,—that, though he seems to tarry in longsuffering, yet he comes in due season after all; and when he comes,—ah! when the last trumpet rings out, and the great white throne is set, and the angels gather in solemn pomp to the tremendous judgment of the grand assize, you will find that the time, which seemed long enough, proved all too short, while the eternity, which you despised, you will dread with such despair as we cannot even imagine now. For ever, for ever, for ever, for ever lost! I see "a rod of an almond tree" for some of you, for it may be that I am addressing some who will never enter any place of worship again. I may be speaking to some out of these many hundreds who will not be alive this day week. Out of our great congregation, there never is a gathering of the same people twice in this place week by week. Even among our membership, there are now, on the average, two a week who are taken home; and I know not how many more out of the congregation. Who will be the next? I see, for that next one, "a rod of an almond tree," for God will hasten his Word to perform it.

While I have felt compelled to speak of these solemn truths, I am glad to turn to the other part of the subject, which is this, that *God is quick in performing his promises.* They are like the almond tree, they blossom and bear fruit very quickly. "What sort of promises," say you, "are thus speedily fulfilled?"

Well, first, the promise to give salvation to all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen,—

> "The moment a sinner believes,
> And trusts in his crucified God,
> His pardon at once he receives,
> Redemption in full thro' his blood."

I see "a rod of an almond tree" here. The psalmist says, "His

word runneth very swiftly;" and I am a witness that it does. Many years ago, I, a poor sinner, went into a place of worship to hear the gospel preached. The preacher repeated the Lord's command, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." I looked to Christ, and I was saved that very instant. It takes no longer to tell the story than it did to work the miracle of mercy. Swift as the lightning's flash I looked to Christ, and the great deed was done; I was a pardoned and justified soul; in a word, I was saved. Why should not the same thing happen to you who are here? It will happen to everyone who shall now be led to believe in Jesus Christ.

"Oh, but!" says one, "there are often long delays before peace is enjoyed." Then, it is because you make them, for God does not. "But sometimes we have to wait," says one. Yes, yes; I know all about that waiting. Do you remember, in the parable of the prodigal son, where he waited? Why, with the harlots and others with whom he wasted his substance in riotous living, or with the swine, when he was feeding them with the husks with which he would fain have filled his own empty belly. That is where he waited; but when did he end his waiting? When he said, "I will arise and go to my father." He did not wait any longer, for we read, "And he arose, and came to his father;" and then it is written, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and"—"and"—"and"—"and stood still, and waited for him to come"? No, no; I know that God waits to be gracious; but, according to the teaching of that parable, "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran." Do you know how fast God can run? Come, now, there is a task for you. We know, sometimes, how fast fleet runners can go. What a rate they go at! As we hear about them, we seem to realize the force of David's description of Saul and Jonathan, "They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions." But again I ask, can you tell me how fast God can run? No, you do not know, you cannot tell; but you do know that he is all on fire with love to embrace a poor penitent sinner, and he speeds towards him at an amazing rate. Remember that hymn with which we commenced this service,—

> "On cherub and on cherubim,
> Full royally he rode,
> And on the wings of mighty winds,
> Came flying all abroad.
>
> 'And so delivered he my soul."

Swift as the lightning's flash is the glance of divine compassion that brings life to a penitent soul. Believe then in Jesus, and "the great transaction's done." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "Why, sir, he only believed a minute ago! Has he received eternal life already?" Yes, he has everlasting life just as surely as if he had been believing in Jesus for fifty years. If thou dost but believe, this blessing is at once thine. "I see a rod of an almond tree." Oh, that thou also mayest see it blossom before thy very eyes, although, when thou camest into this house of prayer, it seemed as bare as the rest of the trees that have been nipped by the wintry winds!

This part of our subject is just as true about prayer. The man who knows how to pray remembers God's promises concerning prayer and its answer. Think of that remarkable passage in Isaiah lxv. 24: "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." That is quicker than the telegraph: "Before they call, I will answer." God knows what petition is in your heart, he foresees what will be the utterance of your tongue, and he has the answers all ready for them. I have found many of my prayers answered years before I prayed them. "No," say you, "that could not be." Well, there was one of them that was answered more than eighteen hundred years before I prayed it. That was when I cried to God for a Saviour, and he gave me One all those centuries before I was born, even the Saviour who worked out for me a complete salvation on Calvary's accursed tree. O ye praying souls, "I see a rod of an almond tree"! When men begin to pray in faith, they are speedily heard.

So is it when God's people want to have their spiritual life revived. When we get into a dull doleful state, as we sometimes do, if we cry to God, he is able quickly to revive our drooping spirits. You remember that verse in the Song of Solomon, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib;"—which were, I suppose, noted for their swiftness;—"I was dull, motionless, lifeless; but before I could tell where I was, I found myself almost flying along like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." So may it be with you, dear friend! Though you are like Laodicea, neither cold nor hot, yet remember what the Lord said to the angel of that church: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Renewed communion with Christ may be enjoyed at once, even by you who have fallen into a lukewarm state.

Our subject applies also to deliverance from trouble. "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." God may not take away your trouble; but yet, in a moment, he may give you grace to bear it, and turn the trouble itself into a source of joy. "I see a rod of an almond tree" full often. In times of deep depression, God can lift up the heart very speedily.

So can he bless his Word. As neither snow nor rain returns to him void, so is it with his Word; it shall prosper in the thing whereto he sent it, and it shall prosper at once. O you who want to win souls, go about your work very boldly, believing that God will bless you! "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," said Christ. When Peter preached, the apostles and disciples did not wait for several years to find out the result of his sermon,—though I daresay there were further results after a long time;—but they picked up three thousand birds which had been brought down by that one discharge of the great gospel gun. Oh, that you and I would so work for God as to expect immediate results, and go and look for them! "I see a rod of an almond tree."

I believe that there are some here who will to-night lay hold on Christ. It was a great joy to me to have a sister come in, just before service, to tell me that, years ago, she found the Lord when I was preaching at the Agricultural Hall. She said, "That will comfort you." I said, "Yes, it does; it shows me that I was useful once; but," I added, "I want to be useful now; I want to see souls brought to Christ now." And so they will be; let us believe it, and see this rod of an almond tree blossom to-night.

III. Now, to close, I can only briefly remind you that THE ALMOND TREE SETS AN EXAMPLE TO ALL WHO WOULD BE LIKE GOD. He hastens his Word to perform it; oh, that you and I would be in haste to perform our word!

Is there one here who *wishes to seek the Lord?* "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." There will be a friend or two, on the lower platform, after the service, to talk with any of you who wish to say anything to them about your own souls, and to hear from them some good words about the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not go away, even from this service, till you have sought and found the Saviour. Seek him now, you young people. Recollect that precious promise, "Those that seek me early shall find me." Others shall find the Lord if they seek him; but, certainly, the young shall do so whatever others do not. Be up early, then, while yet you are in your teens, before you get to be a young man, seek the Lord now, for you shall surely find him if you search for him with all your heart. God help you to do it!

Then, you who have found him, *be prompt in obeying him.* Do you know what David said? "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." If you have found the Saviour by faith, be baptized according to his command and his example. Unite yourself with his people, and begin at once to serve him.

And then, you who have been serving the Saviour, *if you have any good desire in your heart to do anything for Christ, do it.* You may be dead to-morrow morning, therefore I would advise you to do something for Christ to-night. Are you going to leave something in your will for the Master's cause? Be your own executor if you can; and whatever you think of doing, do it speedily; do not leave anything till to-morrow that can be done to-day. "I see a rod of an almond tree." There are some men who must act now, or they never will do anything, for it is pretty nearly the end of the day with them. Up, brother, up! "I see a rod of an almond tree." Do what you can to-night. Speak to your children about Christ to-night. Wake them up if they are in bed. Speak to that friend to whom you have often intended to speak. I know of one who resolved to speak to a man who used to come to his counter twice a week to buy some goods. He thought, "The next time he comes in, I will speak to him about his soul." He never came again! On the morning when he should have come, there came a messenger to say that he was dead. Therefore, take advantage of every opportunity while it lasts. "In the morning sow thy seed;" but do not wait for the morning; "in the evening withhold not thy hand;" and "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

And, lastly, *be ready for your immediate departure.* Be prepared to go home to heaven to-night. Come, now, are all things ready for your journey? If not, pack up all the luggage, label it, and have everything ready for the start at any moment. Blessed is that man who is ready to blossom in heaven any instant. "Oh!" says one, "I should not like to die to-night. I believe that I am a Christian, and that I am saved; but I do not feel ready to go." Set your house in order, then, for your house cannot be right if it is not in order. If your house is in order, why, then you are ready to die. There is no right living except living as you would wish to live if you knew that this was to be your last day. The right way to spend the next hour is so to spend it as if it were your last hour. The Lord bring us into that happy condition that it shall not matter to us one single farthing whether we live or whether we die; and may he keep us in that blessed state, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM XVIII. 1—19.

Verse 1. *I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.*

"I do love thee, and I will love thee yet more and more. I bind myself to thee for the future as well as the present."

2. *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

Note how David delights to heap up poetic imagery to describe his God. They who glory in the Lord would fain speak worthily of him; and because there is no one object in nature that can fully set him forth, they mention many, as David does here. Like him, if we would convey even a faint idea of what God is to us, we must think of all things that are strong, and worthy of our confidence, and putting them all together, we must say that our God, our strength, in whom we trust, is all this, and much more.

3. *I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

Prayer brings salvation. Prayer must, however, be mingled with praise, for prayer and praise make up the breath of the Christian life. Have I not often reminded you that we breathe in the air of heaven by prayer, and then breathe it out again in grateful praise?

4, 5. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.*

"They were before me, behind me, all around my path whichever way I turned."

6. *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.*

What a difference there is between this living God of David,—our living God,—and that impersonal nonentity which, nowadays, is regarded by many as God. The god of the pantheist,—what is he? A nobody and a nothing; but our God made the heavens; and our God heareth the prayer of all who truly cry unto him.

7. *Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.*

The cry of one of his oppressed children stirred him to anger. Nothing moves the heart of God like an injury done to his people. You remember how the prophet Zechariah wrote to the captive Jews in Babylon, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

8, 9. *There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet.*

In this wonderful poetic description, Jehovah is represented as descending from his throne at the cry of one of his children in distress.

10. *And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.*

So swift is prayer to reach the ear of God, and so swift is God to come and answer his people's prayers.

11. *He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.*

Like an Oriental king, who travels beneath his royal canopy, the Lord is pictured as coming to earth with the bursting clouds and opening heavens as the pavilion of the Deity.

12. *At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.*

These are some of the weapons with which he assails the adversaries of his people. With this dread artillery, he smote Pharaoh of old, when he rained hail upon the land of Egypt, and fire mingled with the hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground.

13, 14. *The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.*

God himself came forth on his people's behalf, and fought for them from heaven. As we read that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," so did God make the very tempests in the skies to be like an invincible legion, sweeping before it the enemies of his anointed servant.

15—18. *Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity:*

They went before him, they blocked his way.

18, 19. *But the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

Oh, how sweetly this record continues! Never was there a poem more lofty in its diction. Even Milton cannot equal the language of this Psalm. This inspired writing rises superior to all human compositions, even if regarded only from the poetic point of view.

But what must have been the psalmist's experience when he was delivered after this wonderful fashion? And if God has delivered you and me in a quieter and gentler way, yet he has quite as surely delivered us; and blessed be his name from this time forth, and even for evermore!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—18 (VERSION I.), 900, 196.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CHRIST'S INDWELLING WORD.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 17TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, April 10th, 1881.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."—Colossians iii. 16.

THAT is a very beautiful name for Holy Scripture, I hardly remember to have met with it anywhere else: "Let *the word of Christ* dwell in you." Remember, dear friends, that Christ himself is the Word of God, and recollect also that the Scriptures are the word of the Word. They are "the word of Christ." I think that they will be all the sweeter to you if you realize that they speak to you of Christ, that he is the sum and substance of them, that they direct you to Christ, in fact, as John says of his Gospel, that they were "written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Remember, also, that the Scriptures do, in effect, come to us from Christ. Every promise of this blessed Book is a promise of Christ, "for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us; they all come to us through Christ, God speaks them to us through him as the Mediator. Indeed, we may regard the whole of the Sacred Scriptures, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, as being "the word of Christ."

The text tells us, first, *how to treat the Scriptures:* "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;" and, secondly, it tells us *how to profit by them:* "in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

I. First, then, we are told here HOW TO TREAT THE SCRIPTURES: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

In order that it may dwell in you, *it must first enter into you.* It is implied, in our text, that the apostle says, "Let the word of Christ enter into you." Then you must read it, or hear it, for,

unless you do, you will not know what there is in it. Yet there must be something more than the mere hearing or reading of it; for some hear the truth with one ear, but let it go away out of the other ear; and others are great readers, yet they seem to read only what is on the surface. The letter passes under their eye, but the deep spiritual meaning never enters into their heart. If you read a portion of Scripture every day, I commend you for doing so; if you make a practice of reading right through the Bible in a stated period, I commend you still more. Some I know read the Bible through every year, in due course. This is well; but all this may be done, and yet "the word of Christ" may never have entered into the reader. You know how children sometimes learn their lessons. I am afraid that, at a great many schools, there is no true instruction; but the scholars have simply to repeat their lessons, without ever getting at the sense and meaning of them; and, a week or two after, they have forgotten all that they were supposed to have learnt. Do not let it be so with our knowledge of Scripture; let us not merely know it so as to be able to turn to its different chapters, or to be familiar with certain passages in it, or even to repeat all its words. This is but to let "the word of Christ" pass by your door, or look in at your window; but Paul says, "Let it dwell in you."

So I say again that, in order that it may dwell in you, it must first enter into you. You must really know the spiritual meaning of it; you must believe it; you must live upon it; you must drink it in; you must let it soak into your innermost being as the dew saturated the fleece of Gideon. It is not enough to have a Bible on the shelf; it is infinitely better to have its truths stored up within your soul. It is a good thing to carry your Testament in your pocket, it is far better to carry its message in your heart. But mind that you let it get right into you. How differently some people read the Bible from the way in which they read any other book! I have seen a young woman sitting down, on board a steamboat, completely absorbed in a very suspicious-looking book. I have passed behind her, and passed before her, but she has not taken the slightest notice of me. Presently, I saw a tear brushed away from her eye; I knew that she was not reading the Bible, and it was my firm conviction that she was reading a novel. I have often noticed how such people let the novels get right into them, trash as they generally are; but when the most of people do read the Bible, they appear to be anxious to get the unpleasant task finished, and put away. In some cases, they seem to think that they have performed a very proper action; but they have not been in the least affected by it, moved by it, stirred by it. Yet, if there is any book that can thrill the soul, it is the Bible. If we read it aright, we shall, as it were, lay our fingers among its wondrous harpstrings, and bring out from them matchless music such as no other instrument in the world could ever produce. There is no book so fitted or so suited to us as the Bible is. There is no book that knows us so well, there is no book that is so much at home with us, there is no book that has so much power over us, if we will but give ourselves up to

it; yet, often, we only let it look in at our window, or knock at our door, instead of inviting it to enter our very heart and soul, and therefore we miss its power.

Then, when it once gets into you, *let it remain there.* A person could not be said to dwell in a house even though he should enter into the most private part of it, if he only passed through it, and went away. A man who dwells in a house abides, resides, remains, continues there. Oh, to have "the word of Christ" always dwelling inside of us;—in the memory, never forgotten; in the heart, always loved; in the understanding, really grasped; with all the powers and passions of the mind fully submitted to its control! I love those dear Christian people who do not need to refer to the printed page when you speak to them about the things of God, for they have the truth in their hearts. They have a springing well within their souls at all times; and they have only to hear a Scriptural theme started, and straightway they begin to speak of the things which they have looked upon, and their hands have handled, of the Word of life, because it dwells in them.

What is the good of merely external religion? I heard of some people who met together to pray about a certain matter, but they could not pray because the Bishop had not sent the form of prayer which they were to use on that occasion. I think that, if they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, they might have managed to speak to God without the necessity of having a written or printed form to guide them. Yet there are many who fancy they cannot offer a proper prayer unless they have it in a book; and they cannot talk about the things of God, or they can say but very little about them, because they have not "the word of Christ" dwelling within them. O dear friends, let it be always in you, from morning to night, abiding as a constant visitor within your spirit;—nay, not merely as a visitor, let it dwell with you—

> "No more a stranger or a guest,
> But like a child at home."

Further, "let the word of Christ dwell in you" *so as to occupy your whole being.* If it dwells within you, let it take such entire possession of your being that it shall fill you. To push the truth of Christ up into a corner of your nature,—to fill the major part of your being with other knowledge and other thought,—is a poor way to treat "the word of Christ." It deserves the fullest attention of the best faculties that any man possesses. The truth revealed by the Holy Ghost is so sublime that its poetry outsoars the eagle-wing even of a Milton. It is a deep so profound that the plumb-line of Sir Isaac Newton could never find the bottom of it. The greatest minds have been delighted to yield their highest faculties to its wondrous truths. Dear young friends, you who have only lately put on Christ, I beseech you not to let other books stand on the front shelf, and the Bible lie behind. Do not, for the most part, read those other books, and only read small portions of Scripture now and then; let it always have the chief place. The most excellent of all sciences is the science of Christ crucified, and the Bible is the text-book for all who would learn it. If other forms of

knowledge are useful, they are like the planets; but the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ Jesus is as the sun. Let this always be the centre of your system of knowledge, and let all the rest that you know move in subordination and subjection to that first and best form of knowledge. If I may know myself, and know my Saviour;—if I may know my sin, and the atonement by which it is put away;—if I may know my way through this life, and my way into the eternal life above, I will be content if I know but little else. Fain would I intermeddle with all knowledge; and, though "much study is a weariness of the flesh," yet would I find a pleasure in such weariness, if I only knew even as much as Solomon knew. But it would be vanity of vanities, and altogether vanity, if you and I were as wise as Solomon, and yet did not know the truth of God. Therefore, "let the word of Christ dwell in you" so as to occupy the whole of your being; let it be the resident, the occupant, the master and ruler of your entire nature.

Once more. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you;" that is, *let it be your most familiar friend.* We know the people who live in our home, but we do not really know other people. When someone asked Mr. Whitefield, "What do you think of Mr. So-and-so's character?" he answered, "I cannot say, for I never lived with him." Ah! that is the true test; it is living with people that lets you know what they are. In like manner, if you will live with "the word of Christ," especially if you will let it dwell in you, and abide with you as a constant friend, you will get to know it better; and the better you know it, the more you will love it. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, if you meet with a man who finds fault with the Bible, you may be certain that he never read it. If he would but read it in the right spirit, he would be of another opinion. And if you find a professing Christian indifferent to his Bible, you may be sure that the very dust upon its cover will rise up in judgment against him. The Bible-reader is ever the Bible-lover, and the Bible-searcher is the man who searches it more and more. Various pursuits have a measure of fascination about them, but the study of God's Word is fascinating to the highest degree. Jerome said, when he was pondering a certain text, "I adore the infinity of Holy Scripture;" I have often felt that I could say the same. The Bible is a book that has no bounds to it. Its thoughts are not as men's thoughts, a multitude of which may go to make up half an ounce; but any one of the thoughts of God can outweigh all the thoughts of men. This Book is not a book of pence, or a book of silver, or e'en a book of gold, but a book whose every leaf is of untold value. He shall be enriched indeed who lets "the word of Christ" richly dwell in him.

My dear friends, I should like you so to read the Bible that everybody in the Bible should seem to be a friend of yours. I should like you to feel as if you had talked with Abraham, and conversed with David. I can truly say that there is hardly anybody in the world that I know so well as I know David. In making *The Treasury of David*, I have laboured, year after year, in that rich field of inspiration, the Book of Psalms, till I do assure you that

David and I are quite familiar friends, and I think I know more about him than about any man I ever saw in my life, I seem to know the ins and outs of his constitution and experience, his grievous faults and the graces of his spirit. I want you to be on just such intimate terms with somebody or other in the Bible,—John, if you like; or Mary. Sit at Jesus' feet with her. Or Martha; it will not hurt you to make the acquaintance of Martha, and do a great deal of serving, though I do not want you to get cumbered with it. But do find your choicest friends in the Scripture. Take the whole company of Bible saints home to your heart, let them live inside your soul. Let old Noah come in with his ark, if he likes; and let Daniel come in with his lions' den, if he pleases; and all the rest of the godly men and women of the olden time, take them all into your very nature, and be on familiar terms with them; but, most of all, be specially intimate with him of whom they all speak, namely, Jesus Christ your blessed Lord and Master.

As for the doctrines revealed in the Bible, you should have them at your fingers' ends. The great truths of the Word of God should be as familiar to you as a scholar makes his much-loved classics to be, or as the mathematician makes his *plus* and *minus*, his *a* and his *x*, familiar to him from hour to hour. So do you prize "the word of Christ;" "let it dwell in you richly in all wisdom."

II. But now, secondly, I am to tell you HOW TO PROFIT BY THE WORD OF CHRIST, if we once get it to dwell in us.

First, *seek to profit by it yourself:* "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Let it make you wise. The man who studies his Bible well will become a wise man. If God the Holy Ghost teaches him, I believe that he will become a wise man even in something more than a spiritual sense. Every Scotch child used to be taught the Book of Proverbs, it was one of the class-books of Scotch schools; and I have heard it said that this particular form of instruction has largely helped to make our Scotch friends so sharp and cute; and I should not wonder if that is the case. They certainly are as wise a race of people as we are likely to meet with. I wish our Irish friends also would study the Book of Proverbs. If it would make them as cool as it has made our Scotch friends, it might improve them without taking away any of their natural humour and warmth of heart. I wish that English people also would read more of the Bible. I can truly say that, when I have met with men in whom "the word of Christ" has dwelt richly, I have often found them very shrewd even about common-place things. I recollect a man, in a certain workshop, making a great many very rude remarks, and at last he was silenced by one of the workmen who said to him, "I think, sir, you are referred to in the twentieth chapter of Proverbs." He did not explain his meaning; but the man who was thus addressed went home, and when he looked up the chapter, he found these words in the third verse, "Every fool will be meddling." It was an admirable rebuke for him, and all the better because he had an hour or two before he knew exactly what it was; and when he reached his home, and was at leisure to think, he could look up the passage, and see how appropriate it was

to his case. If you will take the Word of God for your guide, even in domestic and business matters, you will often manifest a shrewdness which, perhaps, may not be natural to you, but which will come to you through "the word of Christ" dwelling in you richly in all wisdom. That, however, is only a small part of the profit which it will bring to you.

Do you want wisdom with which to master yourself? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Do you need something to cheer a naturally sinking spirit? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Do you wish for that which will calm an angry mind, a temper all too apt to be suddenly excited? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Are you in a calling where you are sorely tempted, and do you long to know how to be kept from falling into sin? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Is your position a very difficult one? Are you scarcely able to balance the claims of different relationships? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Are you expecting to have a time of intense strain and trial such as you have never experienced before? Prepare yourself for it by letting "the word of Christ dwell in you richly." It shall give you all manner of wisdom by which you shall be able to baffle even the subtlety of the old serpent himself. We used to have, in many of our churches, a number of solid, substantial men, —"men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do;" and an equal proportion of deeply-taught, godly matrons, true mothers in Israel. Well, those stalwart Christians were brought up on such spiritual meat as I have been commending to you. They were diligent students of the Word of God; and if we are to have a succession of such men and women, they can only be qualified by going to the University of Scripture, and taking their degree by permitting "the word of Christ" to dwell in them richly.

The next way of using "the word of Christ" to profit is to *seek to profit others by it:* "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." We are to know the truth ourselves so as to be able to teach and admonish one another.

First, we are to seek the profit of our fellows by teaching one another. No one man can ever teach such a vast congregation as I have, so as to give the separate instruction that is needed by each one; this work must be done by the members of the church themselves. "The word of Christ" must dwell in you, and then you must become a Mutual Instruction Society. Every Christian should exercise the office of the pastorate according to his ability and his opportunity. In such a church as this, every one of the members must look well not only to his own spiritual affairs, but also to the wellbeing of others. What sweet and gracious instructions the older ones among you can give if you tell out your experience! It is very interesting to any of us to hear it, but how helpful it is to the beginners in the divine life!

And if, in addition to relating your experience, you talk of the

Scriptures that have been opened up to you,—the promises that have been fulfilled to you,—the passages in the Bible that have been applied to your heart by the Holy Spirit who inspired them,—you will greatly instruct your fellow-Christians. A dear brother in the Lord said to me, the other day, "I do not often meet now with those people who talk about the things of God to one another. Even when I meet with Christians, their conversation is generally concerning a meeting or a Conference that is going to be held, or something that is to be done; but we do not seem to talk much about Jesus Christ himself, and about experimental truth, and about the sorrows and the joys of God's people." I wish we did talk more of such things. It is well to be busy for the Lord; but it is better still to be in communion with him. You who are deeply taught in the Scriptures should try to teach others also for their profit.

One way of teaching one another is mentioned in the text: "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." A learned divine, a little while ago, discovered that no hymn ought to be sung unless it was distinctly directed and addressed to God, and was intended to be throughout full of praise. Well, we do have some remarkably wise men nowadays,—at least, in their own estimation,—but it appears that the apostle Paul thought that "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" were to be used for instruction and admonition as well as for the praises of God. And, to my mind, there is no teaching that is likely to be more useful than that which is accompanied by the right kind of singing. When I am preaching, I often find a verse of a hymn the very best thing I can quote; and I have not the shadow of a doubt that, frequently, a verse of sacred poetry has struck a man who has been altogether missed by the rest of the sermon. Think how compactly truth can be taught by means of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," and how likely it is to be remembered when the very measure and rhyme and rhythm help the memory to treasure up the message. I shall never forget what repentance is while I can say,—

> "Repentance is to leave
> The sins I loved before,
> And show that I in earnest grieve
> By doing so no more."

It is well to have truth put into the form of a verse that the memory may be able to lay hold of it, and to retain it. Do try, dear friends, to get so full of "the word of Christ" in all forms of it, that you may run over with it. You know, it cannot come out of you if it is not first in you. If you do not get "the word of Christ" into you, you will not be instructive in your general conversation.

In addition to instruction, there is to be admonition. That is a very difficult thing to administer wisely. I have known a brother try to admonish another, and I have felt that he would have done better if he had left the task alone, for he has only caused irritation and resentment; but there is a gracious way of admonishing which cannot be too frequently practised. When I first began to preach,

I am afraid that I used to say a great many strange things,—which, of course, I do not do now;—but having, on a certain occasion, said something rather striking, and perhaps not quite wise, there was an excellent Christian man who wanted to set me right. He did not come and thrust himself upon me in a very solemn manner, and provoke me to scoff at him, and his reproof also. Neither did he say anything so as to irritate me; but finding my Bible lying about, he stuck a pin into it at the words, "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." When I was at home, I looked at that pin, and I looked at that text, and I said to myself, "Whose house was I in last?" When I recollected, I said, "That is the man who stuck that pin in there, depend upon it." I never felt vexed with him; on the contrary, I was very grateful to him, and I always loved and admired him; and I thought, "Now, if he had spoken to me about what I had said, it is possible that he might have stuck the pin into me where I should not have liked it; but as he only stuck it into my Bible, it did not irritate me." You see, also, that I gratefully recollect the rebuke even to this day.

Sometimes, the best way to give an admonition will be by singing a psalm or a hymn. The clerks in the old meeting-houses, when they used to be allowed to choose the hymns, have often taken away much of the evil effect of an erroneous sermon by their wise selection of the closing verses. Now and then, if you are discreet, you can quote an appropriate verse,—as people say, "accidentally for the purpose,"—and you can bring in a portion of a psalm that shall exactly say for you what you might have said in a blundering way; and the dear brother who has done wrong will accept the rebuke without being enraged by it. When you attempt to snuff the candle, do not put it out by your clumsiness; but take the golden snuffers,—in the form of a verse of a psalm, or a hymn, or a spiritual song,—and even while you sing it, you will be administering the admonition and the instruction which it is your duty to give. I wish to put this matter so that it shall be remembered by you, and I want especially to press it home upon you, dear friends, members of this church of more than five thousand souls. What can we do unless you all look after one another? And how shall we ever get on unless, in addition to preaching, there shall be continual mutual instruction going on, wise and joyful and cheerful, and accepted in a kind, loving, and generous spirit? God fill you with "the word of Christ," that you may thus teach and admonish one another!

But, lastly, "the word of Christ," when it dwells in us, is *to profit us in our relation to God himself;* for, after all, the main object of our singing—the principal purpose of our teaching and admonishing—must be the glory of God: "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Oh, may "the word of Christ dwell in you" so richly that you shall bless God from morning to night! May you so overflow with holy thought and sacred knowledge that your whole being shall be a hymn of praise to the Most High, and your entire existence shall be a glorious hallelujah! I do not think that we any of us sufficiently value the divine ordinance of praise;

neither do I think that we ever shall till "the word of Christ" has taken full possession of our souls.

You have been upstairs to pray, you say, and you have got no comfort from the exercise. Let me suggest that, the next time you go upstairs, you sing a psalm. "Oh, I have been up and down!" says one, "trying to arouse myself into earnestness of supplication." May I also propose to you that you do not try that method again for a while, but begin to praise God. How many times a day do you praise him? I think you do get alone to pray, and you would be ashamed if you did not, once, twice, or three or even more times in the day; but how often do you praise God? Now, you know that you will not pray in heaven; there it will be all praise. Then do not neglect that necessary part of your education which is to "begin the music here." Start at once praising the Lord. Many of our doubts and fears would fly away if we praised God more; and many of our trials and troubles would altogether vanish if we began to sing of our mercies. Oftentimes, depression of spirit, that will not yield to a whole night of wrestling, would yield to ten minutes of thanksgiving before God. Praying is the stalk of the wheat, but praise is the very ear of it. Praying is the leaf of the rose, but praise is the rose itself, redolent with the richest perfume.

Praise God, then, "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," and if you say you do not know how to do it, then "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." It is a praise-begetting thing. Out of every Book of Scripture will stream praise unto Jehovah. Out of every promise will spring a sonnet. Out of every divine truth, enjoyed and lived upon, will rise a spiritual song. The whole revelation of God is the condensed essence of praise; you have only to give it a fitting opportunity, by setting it simmering on the fire of a grateful heart, and you shall find a sweet cloud of holy incense rising from it acceptable to the Most High. Therefore, beloved, be much with your Bibles, and let your Bibles be much with you; for your own profit, for the profit of others, and for the glory of God. **So be it,** for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

COLOSSIANS III. 1—17.

Verse 1. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

Your Lord and Master has gone up to heaven. You profess that he represents you, and that you have gone up there in him and with him. Then do not seek the things that are down here below, the things of earth; but live where your life has gone. Where your treasure is, there let your heart be also. "Seek those things which are above."

2, 3. *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead,—*

You profess to be dead to the world; is that profession false? You

have observed that Scriptural ordinance in which you profess to be buried with Christ; was that observance only an empty form? If there was any truth in your profession, "Ye are dead,"—

3. *And your life is hid with Christ in God.*

You have a new life now; it is up yonder, "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Do you not feel drawings upward? Are there no longings after the high and heavenly estate where Jesus is? Come, beloved, let your soul break loose for a while; and, like a lark that, having found its liberty, ascends with joyous wing, singing as it rises till it is out of mortal sight, so let it be with you.

4. *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

You are hidden now, your life is veiled in him; but at his second coming he shall shine forth in all his glory, and "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Beloved, seek no greatness here; ask not for any exaltation of yourself among the sons of men; but wait for your true manifestation with Christ in glory.

5. *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:*

Kill all these evil things; do not let them live in you for a single moment. The command applies, not only to the grosser actions which are summed up under the head of fornication and uncleanness, but to all that leads to those foul sins; not only to the fire, but also to the sparks, such as "inordinate affection", a sort of softness which is seen in some persons, men and women, too, and which often leads to something far worse;—and "evil concupiscence", the first desires towards that which is unchaste. God give us grace to kill these loathsome things at once, for if thoughts of evil are indulged, they soon become acts of evil, and then who knows how far we may go in the way of unholiness? Sin, if allowed to grow in the heart, will soon take gigantic strides, and come out in the life. Depend upon it, whenever a professing Christian goes into overt sin of the kind mentioned here, he does not do it on a sudden. The evil has long been festering and fomenting within his heart, or it would not have manifested itself thus. Oh! if he had only watched, and destroyed the thief ere he broke open the house, what a mercy it would have been! You notice that covetousness is put down with the most filthy sins, and it is described as idolatry. The desire to possess the goods that belong to others, the lust to get gain at any price, this is idolatry.

6, 7. *For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.*

This was true of the Colossians, and it was true of almost all those to whom Paul wrote, for these gross evils were scarcely regarded as sins in his time, so polluted had the nations become. I hope that, in the case of many now living, they have been preserved by Christian training from having walked even for a time in such sins.

8. *But now ye also put off all these;—*

Put them all off, like old clothes that are never to be worn again: "Put off all these;"—

8. *Anger,—*

It is hard work for some to pull that garment off, for it fits them so tightly. This burning coat of wrath will not readily come off; but the apostle's command is, "Put it off! Put it off!" It does not become a Christian to be an angry man.

8. *Wrath, malice,*

Christ will not live in a heart that harbours malice.

8. *Blasphemy,—*

Thank God that, if we ever wore that robe, we pulled it off long ago.

8. *Filthy communication out of your mouth.*

All talking that is of a dubious character must go. Anything which savours of corruption and defilement must be put away from every Christian.

9. *Lie not one to another,—*

In Paul's day, lying was thought to be a virtue unless the liar happened to be found out; in that case, it was considered wrong; but to lie through thick and thin, and to lie so dexterously as to deceive, was looked upon by an Oriental as an accomplishment of which he might be proud. So the apostle might well write, "Lie not one to another,"—

9, 10. *Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

There is nothing false or untrue in God. God is true, and in him is no falsehood at all; and if you and I have really been renewed, as we profess to have been, we shall hate the very semblance of a lie, and our word will be as good as our bond.

11. *Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

Whenever you hear certain very wise brethren say, "Such-and-such a promise in the Bible is for Israel, not for the Gentiles," do not you be misled in the least by their assertion; but just quote this text to them: "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." These distinctions all vanish when once we come to Christ; we are one in him, and every promise to believers is good to all who are in Christ Jesus, for "Christ is all, and in all."

12. *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness,—*

Be ready to feel for others; be very considerate of their needs. Look at others as if they were your kith and kin; if you and they are in Christ, they are indeed your kin, so put on kinned-ness, or "kindness,"—

12. *Humbleness of mind,—*

Do not try to be a big man. He who thinks himself big has not yet learnt the true spirit of Christianity. Especially towards those who are sorrowful and sad, be pitiful, be kind, be humble.

12. *Meekness,—*

If others try to provoke you, do not be provoked by them; but be gentle and meek.

12. *Longsuffering;—*

Continue to put up with others, remembering the Lord's longsuffering with you.

13. *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

Hear this, beloved, I pray you; especially those of you who have hot tempers, and have fallen out with one another. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Remember how much Christ has forgiven you, and show a forbearing and forgiving spirit to others.

14. *And above all these things put on charity,—*

Or, rather, "love,"—

14. *Which is the bond of perfectness.*

The perfect bond, the girdle that goes round, and keeps every other garment of virtue in its place.

15. *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body;*

Do not fall out with one another. You are called to peace, for you are called in one body. Does one hand in the body fight with the other hand? Does the foot contend with the eye? Of course not, for they are in one body. So are you in one body with all your fellow-Christians, therefore lay aside all strife. I deeply deplore when I see Christians—and especially eminent Christians—contending with one another about minor matters of small account. Surely, almost anything ought to be borne before there should be public strife among members of the one body. God grant that such a state of things may speedily come to an end wherever it has existed! We have enough to do to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," without contending for our own dignity or honour.

15. *And be ye thankful.*

That is a nice little text, "Be ye thankful." When you are grumbling at your plain food, put this as a sandwich between your bread and butter, "Be ye thankful." When you are complaining of the East wind, just try if you cannot spell this little sentence, "Be ye thankful." When you are murmuring about those sharp pains and that long sickness, this is the kind of tune for the little bird to whistle at your window, "Be ye thankful." We have all much for which we ought to be thankful, however sad we may think our lot to be. Look on the bright side, rejoice in God: "Be ye thankful."

16, 17. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

Do not draw any line of demarcation, and say, "So far is secular, and so far is religious." Let your whole life be religious; and if there is anything proposed to you, in which you cannot glorify God, do not touch it. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

If any of you go to the theatre, can you go there in the name of the Lord Jesus? Why, you would not dare to cross the threshold with such blasphemy in your soul! And when you go to any place of doubtful amusement, can you go there giving thanks to God and the Father by Jesus Christ? Can you thank the Lord that you are permitted to go, and pray for divine blessing when you go, and when you come away? A lady once said to a Christian minister, "The pleasures of going to the play are very great; there is the pleasure of thinking of it beforehand, the enjoyment of it at the time, and then the pleasure of thinking of it afterwards." "Yes, madam," said the good man, "and there is one other pleasure which you seem to have forgotten, that is the pleasure of thinking of it on your dying bed; I would like you to remember that." Let me read this verse again: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." If you cannot do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, do not do it at all if you are a Christian; and even if you are not a Christian, you will be accountable to God, by-and-by, for all that you do.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

RUTH DECIDING FOR GOD.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 24TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, April 21st, 1881.

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."—Ruth i. 16.

THIS was a very brave, outspoken confession of faith. Please to notice that it was made by a woman, a young woman, a poor woman, a widow woman, and a foreigner. Remembering all that, I should think there is no condition of gentleness, or of obscurity, or of poverty, or of sorrow, which should prevent anybody from making an open confession of allegiance to God when faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has been exercised. If that is your experience, my dear friend, then whoever you may be, you will find an opportunity, somewhere or other, of declaring that you are on the Lord's side. I am glad that all candidates for membership in our church make their confession of faith at our church-meetings. I have been told that such an ordeal must keep a great many from joining us; yet I notice that, where there is no such ordeal, they often have very few members, but here are we with five thousand six hundred, or thereabouts, in church-fellowship, and very seldom, if ever, finding anybody kept back by having to make an open confession of faith in Christ. It does the man, the woman, the boy, or the girl, whoever it is, so much good for once, at least, to say right out straight, "I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am not ashamed of it," that I do not think we shall ever deviate from our custom. I have also noticed that, when people have once confessed Christ before men, they are very apt to do it again somewhere else; and they thus acquire a kind of boldness and outspokenness upon religious matters, and a holy courage as followers of Christ, which more than make up for any self-denial and trembling which the effort may have cost them.

I think Naomi was quite right to drive Ruth, as it were, to take this brave stand, in which it became an absolute necessity for her to speak right straight out, and say, in the words of our text, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee:

for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." What is there for any of us to be ashamed of in acknowledging that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ? What can there be that should cause us to be ashamed of Jesus, or make us blush to own his name?

> "Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend
> On whom my hopes of heaven depend!
> No: when I blush, be this my shame,
> That I no more revere his name."

We ought to be ashamed of being ashamed of Jesus; we ought to be afraid of being afraid to own him; we ought to tremble at trembling to confess him, and to resolve that we will take all suitable opportunities that we can find of saying, first to relatives, and then to all others with whom we come into contact, "We serve the Lord Christ."

I should think that Naomi was—certainly she ought to have been—greatly cheered by hearing this declaration from Ruth, especially the last part of it: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Naomi had suffered great temporal loss; she had lost her husband and her two sons; but now she had found the soul of her daughter-in-law; and I believe that, according to the scales of true judgment, there ought to have been more joy in her heart at the conversion of Ruth's soul than grief over the death of her husband and her sons. Our Lord Jesus has told us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" and I always understand, by that expression, that there is joy in the heart of God himself over every sinner's repentance. Well, then, if Naomi's husband and sons were true believers,—if they had been walking aright before the Lord,—as, let us hope, they had done, she need not have felt such sorrow for them as could at all compare with the joy of her daughter-in-law being saved.

Perhaps, some of you, dear friends, have had bereavements in your homes; but if the death—the temporal death—of one should be the means of the spiritual life of another, there is a clear gain, I am sure there is; and though you may have gone weeping to the grave, yet, if you have evidence that, with those tears, there were also tears of repentance on the part of others of your family, and with that sad glance into the grave there was also a believing look at the dying, risen, and living Saviour, you are decidedly a gainer, and you need not say, with Naomi, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Really Naomi, with her converted daughter-in-law at her side, if she had only been able to look into the future, might have been a happier woman than when she went away with her husband and her boys, for now she had with her one who was to be in the direct line of the progenitors of Christ,—a right royal woman; for I count that the line of Christ is the true imperial line, and that they were the most highly honoured among men and women who were in any way associated with the birth of the Saviour into this world; and Ruth, though a Moabitess, was one of those who were elected to share in this high privilege.

So I beg you, if you have been sorrowful because of any deaths in your family circle, to pray God to outweigh that sorrow with a greater measure of joy because, by his grace, he has brought other members of your family to trust in Jesus.

Another thought strikes me here; that is, that it was when Naomi returned to the land which she ought never to have left, it was when she came out from the idolatrous Moabites among whom she had, as you see, relatives, and friends, and acquaintances,—it was when she said, "I will go back to my own country, and people, and God,"—that then the Lord gave her the soul of this young woman who was so closely related to her. It may be that some of you professedly Christian people have been living at a distance from God. You have not led the separated life; you have tried to be friendly with the world as well as with Christ, and your children are not growing up as you wish they would. You say that your sons are not turning out well, and that your girls are dressy, and flighty, and worldly. Do you wonder that it is so? "Oh!" you say, "I have gone a good way to try to please them, thinking that, perhaps, by so doing, I might win them for Christ." Ah! you will never win any soul to the right by a compromise with the wrong. It is decision for Christ and his truth that has the greatest power in the family, and the greatest power in the world, too. If a soldier in the barracks is converted, and he says, "I mean to be a Christian; but, at the same time, I will join with the other men as much as I can; I will sometimes step into the public-house with them," and so forth, he will do no good. But the moment he boldly takes his stand for his new Captain, and is known to be a Christian, his comrades may begin to scoff at him, but they will also begin to be impressed; and if he bravely maintains that stand, and never gives way in the least degree, but is faithful to his Lord and Master, then he will be likely to see conversions among his fellow-soldiers.

It was while Naomi was on her way back to her own land that she heard the good news that her dear daughter-in-law had decided to be a follower of Jehovah, and to say, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." This gave her great joy; but how must some of you Christian people feel when you find out that others have been caused to stumble through your living at a distance from Christ? What pangs of remorse will seize you when you discover that your arm has been paralyzed for good, that you have been unable to lead others to the Saviour, because you yourself were living so far off from him that it was a serious question whether you were not growing to be a worshipper of the Moabitish idols, and giving up altogether your profession of being a follower of the one true God!

Now, with this as a preface, I come distinctly to the subject of the text. Here is a young woman who says to a follower of Jehovah, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

I. My first observation is, that AFFECTION FOR THE GODLY SHOULD INFLUENCE US TO GODLINESS.

It did so in this case. Affection for their godly mother-in-law influenced both Orpah and Ruth for a time, "and they said unto

her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." They were both drawn part of the way towards Canaan; but, alas! natural affection has not sufficient power in itself to draw anybody to decision for God. It may be helpful to that end; it may be one of the "cords of a man" and "bands of love" which God, in his infinite mercy, often uses in drawing sinners to himself; but there has to be something more than that mere human affection. Still, it ought to be of some service in leading to decision; and it is a very dreadful thing when those who have godly parents seem to be the worse rather than the better for that fact, or when men, who have Christian wives, rebel against the light, and become all the more wicked because God has blessed their homes with godly women who speak to them, lovingly and tenderly, concerning the claims of the religion of Jesus. That is a terrible state of affairs, for it ought always to be the case that our affection for godly people should help to draw us towards godliness. In Ruth's case, by the grace of God, it was the means of leading her to the decision expressed in our text, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Many forces may be combined to bring others to this decision. First, *there is the influence of companionship.* Nobody doubts that evil company tends to make a man bad, and it is equally sure that good companionship has a tendency to influence men towards that which is good. It is a happy thing to have side by side with you one whose heart is full of love to God. It is a great blessing to have as a mother a true saint, or to have as a brother or a sister one who fears the Lord; and it is a special privilege to be linked for life, in the closest bonds, with one whose prayers may rise with ours, and whose praises may also mingle with ours. There is something about Christian companionship which must tell in the right direction unless the heart be resolutely bent on mischief.

There is something more than this, however, and that is, *the influence of admiration.* There can be no doubt whatever that Ruth looked with loving reverence and admiration upon Naomi, for she saw in her a character which won her heart's esteem and affection. The few glimpses which we have of that godly woman, in this Book of Ruth, show us that she was a most disinterested and unselfish person, not one who, because of her own great sorrow, would burden others with it, and pull them down to her own level in order that they might in some way assist her. She was one who considered the interests of others rather than her own; and all such persons are sure to win admiration and esteem. When a Christian man so lives that others see something about him which they do not perceive in themselves, that is one way in which they are often attracted towards the Christian life. When the sick Christian is patient, when the poor Christian is cheerful, when the believer in Christ is forgiving, generous, tenderhearted, sympathetic, honest, upright, then it is that observers say, "Here is something worth looking at; whence came all this excellence?" And they take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus, and that they have learnt these things of him; and in that way they are themselves inclined to become his followers.

Nor is it only by companionship and admiration that people are won to the Saviour; there is also *the influence of instruction.* I have no doubt that Naomi gave her daughter-in-law much helpful teaching. Ruth would want to know about Naomi's God, and Naomi would be only too glad to tell her all she knew. When the Spaniards went over to South America, they treated the poor natives so badly that the Indians did not wish to know anything about the Spaniards' god, for they thought, from the cruelties they had suffered, that he must be a devil; and there are certain sorts of professors who are so unkind, they have such an absence of everything gentle and generous about them, that one does not want to know anything about their god, for if they are like him, probably he is the devil.

But, dear friends, it ought not to be so with us. We should make people want to know what our religion really is, and then be ready to tell them. I have no doubt that, many a time, in the land of Moab, when her daughters-in-law ran in to see her, Naomi would begin telling them about the deliverance at the Red Sea, and how the Lord brought his people through the wilderness, and how the goodly land, which flowed with milk and honey, had been given to them by the hand of Joshua. Then she would tell them about the tabernacle and its worship, and talk to them about the lamb, and the red heifer, and the bullock, and the sin-offering, and so on; and it was thus, probably, that Ruth's heart had been won to Jehovah the God of Israel. And, perhaps, for that reason,—because of Naomi's instruction,—Ruth said to her, "'Thy people shall be my people;' I know so much about them, that I want to be numbered with them; 'and thy God shall be my God.' Thou hast told me about him, what wonders he has wrought, and I have resolved to trust myself under the shadow of his wings." Well, beloved, it ought to be thus with us also. We should take care that the influence of our companionship, the influence of our lives, in which there should be something for observers to admire, and the influence of our conversation, which should be full of gracious instruction, should lead those who come under our influence in the right way.

Besides that, I have no doubt that some persons are drawn towards good things by *a desire to cheer the godly persons whom they love;* and, though I do not put this forward as one of the highest and strongest motives, yet I do feel at liberty to suggest to some young people here that their sins are a great grief to their loving fathers and mothers, and that, if their hearts were given to Christ, it would fill the whole house with holy joy. It was a great joy to me when my sons were born, but it was an infinitely surpassing joy as, one after the other, they told me that they had sought and found the Saviour. To pray with them, to point them yet more fully to Christ, to hear the story of their spiritual troubles, and to help them out of their spiritual difficulties, was an intense satisfaction to my soul. Ah! my young friends, you do not know how much those who love you would be cheered if you were converted,—especially any of you who have not lived as you should have done,—who have, perhaps, even gone away from home, and acted in a way that might

well bring your father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. I think that he would almost dance with delight if he could only hear that you were truly converted to God. I know a minister, who took out of his pocket an old letter that was nearly worn to pieces; he made a journey from the country to bring it up for me to see. It was not really old, it was worn out because he had so constantly taken it out to read. It was somewhat to this effect. His son had been such a scapegrace, and such a disgrace to his family, that he was helped to go abroad, and he came to London to join the ship. As he had heard his father speak of me, he thought that he would spend his last Thursday night, before starting on the Friday morning, in hearing me in this Tabernacle; and here God met with him, for I was moved by the Holy Spirit to say, "Here you are, Jack; going away from home, from your father's house. Oh, that the great Father in heaven would take you to himself!" It happened that his name was Jack, so it was the very word for him, and the Lord blessed it to him there and then. He went to America. He did not write to his father to tell him about his conversion till he had had time to prove the reality of it; but when he had been baptized, and had joined the church, and walked consistently for six months, he sent the good news home. The old man said, "I thought he might have been lost at sea, but the Lord had saved him through your preaching. God bless you, sir!" I had a thousand blessings heaped upon my head by that grateful father. It was only a simple sermon that I had preached on a Thursday night, but it was the means of that son's conversion, and it was the source of great joy to that father. He did not mind about his son being in America, or what he was doing, so long as he had become a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a mercy it would be if this sermon should be blessed as that one was!

I think, too, that there was another thing which had great influence over Ruth, as it has had over a great many other people. That is, *the fear of separation.* "Ah!" said one to me, only last week, "it used to trouble me greatly when my wife went downstairs to the communion, and I had to go home, or to remain with the spectators in the gallery. I did not like to be separated from her even here; and then, sir, the thought stole over me, 'What if I have to be divided from her for ever and ever?'" I think that a similar reflection ought, with the blessing of God, to impress a good many. Young man, if you live and die impenitent, you will see your mother no more, except it be from an awful distance, with a great gulf fixed between her and you, so that she cannot cross over to you, or you go over to her. There will come a day when one shall be taken and another left; and before the great separation takes place, at the judgment-seat of Christ, when there shall be a sundering made between the goats and the sheep, and between the tares and the wheat, I do implore you to let the influence of the godly whom you love help to draw you towards decision for God and his Christ.

II. My time would fail me if I dwelt longer on this point, though it is a very interesting one, so I must pass on to my second

observation, which is, that RESOLVES TO GODLINESS WILL BE TESTED. Ruth speaks very positively: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." This was her resolve, but it was a resolve which had already been put to the test, and had in great measure satisfactorily passed through it.

First, *it had been tested by the poverty and the sorrow of her mother-in-law.* Naomi said, "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me;" yet Ruth says, "Thy God shall be my God." I like that brave resolution of the young Moabitess. Some people say, "We should like to be converted, for we want to be happy." Yes, but suppose you knew that you would not be happy after conversion, you ought still to wish to have this God to be your God. Naomi has lost her husband, she has lost her sons, she has lost everything; she is going back penniless to Bethlehem, and yet her daughter-in-law says to her, "Thy God shall be my God." Oh, dear friends, if you can share the lot of Christians when they are in trouble, if you can take God and affliction, if you can accept Christ and a cross, then your decision to be his follower is true and real. It has been tested by the afflictions and the trials which you know belong to the people of God, yet you are content to suffer with them in taking their God to be your God, too.

Next, Ruth's decision had been tested when *she was bidden to count the cost.* Naomi had put the whole case before her. She had told her daughter-in-law that there was no hope that she should ever bear a son who could become a husband to Ruth, and that she had better stay and find a husband in her own land. She set before her the dark side of the case,—possibly too earnestly. She seemed as if she wanted to persuade her to go back, though I do not think that, in her heart, she could really have wished her to do so. But, my young friend, before you say to any Christian, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," count the cost. Recollect, if you are following an evil trade, you will have to give it up; if you have formed bad habits, you will have to forsake them; and if you have had bad companions, you will have to leave them. There are a great many things, which have afforded you pleasure, which must become painful to you, and must be renounced. Are you prepared to follow Christ through the mire and the slough, as well as along the high road, and down in the valley as well as up upon the hills? Are you ready to carry his cross as you hope, afterwards, to share his crown? If you can stand the test in detail, —such a test as Christ set before those who wanted to be his followers on earth, then is your decision a right one, but not else.

Ruth had been tried, too, by *the apparent coldness of one in whom she trusted,* and whom she had a right to trust, for Naomi did not at all encourage her; indeed, she seemed to discourage her. I am not sure that Naomi is to be blamed for that, and I am not certain that she is to be much praised. You know, it is quite possible for you to encourage people too much. I have known some encouraged in their doubts and fears till they never could get out of them. At the same time, you can certainly very easily chill enquirers and seekers. And though Naomi showed her love to Ruth, yet she did

not seem to have any very great desire to bring her to follow Jehovah. This is a test that many young people find to be very trying; but this young woman said to her mother-in-law, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Another trial for Ruth was *the drawing back of her sister-in-law.* Orpah kissed Naomi, and left her; and you know the influence of one young person upon another when they are of the same age, or when they are related as these two were. You went to the revival meeting with a friend, and she was as much impressed as you were. She has gone back to the world, and the temptation is for you to do the same. Can you stand out against it? You two young men went to hear the same preacher, and you both felt the force of the Word; but your companion has gone back to where he used to be. Can you hold out now, and say, "I will follow Christ alone if I cannot find a companion to go with me"? If so, it is well with you.

"Can ye cleave to your Lord? Can ye cleave to your Lord,
When the many turn aside?
Can ye witness he hath the living Word,
And none upon earth beside?
And can ye endure with the virgin band,
The lowly and pure in heart,
Who, whithersoever the Lamb doth lead,
From his footsteps ne'er depart?

"Do ye answer, 'We can'? Do ye answer, 'We can,
Through his love's constraining power'?
But, ah! remember the flesh is weak,
And will shrink in the trial-hour.
Yet yield to his love, who round you now,
The bands of a man would cast;
The cords of his love, who was given for you,
To the altar binding you fast."

But one of the worst trials that Ruth had was *the silence of Naomi.* I think that is what is meant, for after she had solemnly declared that she would follow the Lord, we read, "When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her." She left off stating the black side of the case, but she does not appear to have talked to her about the bright side. "She left speaking unto her." The good woman was so sorrowful that she could not talk, her heart-break was so great that she could not converse, but such silence must have been very trying to Ruth; and when a young person has just joined the people of God, it is a severe test to be brought face to face with a very mournful Christian, and not to get one encouraging word. Sometimes, brethren and sisters, we must swallow our own bitter pills as fast as ever we can, that we may not discourage others by making a wry face over them. It is sometimes the very best thing a sorrowful person can do to say, "I must not be sad; here is young So-and-so coming in. I must be cheerful now, for here comes one who might

be discouraged by my grief." You remember how the psalmist, when he was in a very mournful state of mind, said, "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me." Let it be too painful for us to give any cause for stumbling or disquietude to those who have just come to the Saviour, but let us cheer and encourage them all we can. Still, Naomi's silence did not discourage Ruth; she was evidently a strong-minded though gentle young woman, and she gave herself up to God and his people without any reserve. Even though she might not be helped much by the older believer, and might even be discouraged by her, and still more by the departure of her sister-in-law Orpah, yet still she pressed on in the course she had chosen. Well, you do the same, Mary; and you, Jane, and John, and Thomas. Will you be like Mr. Pliable, and go back to the City of Destruction? Or will you, like Christian, pursue your way, and steadfastly hold on through the Slough of Despond, or whatever else may be in your pathway to the Celestial City?

III. Now, thirdly, and very briefly, TRUE GODLINESS MUST MAINLY LIE IN THE CHOICE OF GOD. That is the very pith of the text: "Thy God shall be my God."

First, dear friends, *God is the believer's choicest possession;* indeed, it is the distinguishing mark of a Christian that he owns a God. Naomi had not much else,—no husband, no son, no lands, no gold, no silver, no pleasure even; but she had a God. Come, now, my friend, are you determined that, henceforth, and for ever, the Lord shall be your chief possession? Can you say, "God shall be mine; my faith shall grasp him now, and hold him fast"?

Next, *God was, henceforth, to Ruth, as he had been to Naomi, her Ruler and Law-giver.* When anyone truthfully says, "God shall be my God," there is some practical meaning about that declaration; it means, "He shall influence me; he shall direct me; he shall lead me; he shall govern me; he shall be my King. I will yield to him and obey him in everything. I will endeavour to do all things according to his will. God shall be my God." You must not want to take God to be your helper, in the sense of making him to be your servant; but to be your Master, and so to help you. Dear friends, does the Holy Spirit lead you to make this blessed choice, and to declare, "This God shall be mine, my Law-giver and Ruler from this time forth"?

Well, then, *he must also be your Instructor.* At the present day, I am afraid that nine people out of ten do not believe in the God who is revealed to us in the Bible. "What?" you say. It is so, I grieve to say. I can point you to newspapers, to magazines, to periodicals, and also to pulpits by the score, in which there is a new god set up to be worshipped;—not the God of the Old Testament, he is said to be too strict, too severe, too stern for our modern teachers. They do not believe in him. The God of Abraham is dethroned by many nowadays; and in his place they have a molluscous god, like those of whom Moses spoke, "new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not." They shudder

at the very mention of the God of the Puritans. If Jonathan Edwards were to rise from the dead, they would not listen to him for a minute, they would say that they had quite a new god since his day; but, brethren, I believe in the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; this God is my God;—ay, the God that drowned Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea, and moved his people to sing "Hallelujah" as he did it; the God that caused the earth to open, and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all their company;—a terrible God is the God whom I adore;—he is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, full of mercy, compassion, and grace, tender and gentle, yet just and dreadful in his holiness, and terrible out of his holy places. This is the God whom we worship, and he who comes to him in Christ, and trusts in him, will take him to be his Instructor, and so shall he learn aright all that he needs to know. But woe unto the men of this day, who have made unto themselves a calf of their own devising, which has no power to bless or to save them! "Thy God" says Ruth to Naomi,—not another god,—not Chemosh or Moloch, but Jehovah—"shall be my God;" and so she took him to be her Instructor, as we also must do.

Then, let us take him to be *our entire trust and stay.* O my beloved friends, the happiest thing in life is to trust God,—first to trust him with your soul through Jesus Christ the Saviour, and then to trust him with everything, and in everything. I am speaking what I do know. The life of sense is death, but the life of faith is life indeed. Trust God about temporals,—nay, I do not know any division between temporals and spirituals;—trust God about everything, about your daily livelihood, about your health, about your wife, about your children; live a life of faith in God, and you will truly live, and all things will be right about you. It is because we get partly trusting God and partly trusting ourselves that we are often so unhappy. But when, by simple faith, you just cast yourselves on God, then you find the highest joy and bliss that is possible on earth, and a whole series of wonders is spread out before you; your life becomes like a miracle, or a succession of miracles, God hearing your prayers, and answering you out of heaven, delivering you in the time of trial, supplying your every need, and leading you ever onward by a matchless way which you know not, which every moment shall cause you greater astonishment and delight as you see the unfoldings of the character of God. Oh, that each one of you would say, "This God shall be my God; I will trust him; by his grace, I will trust him now."

IV. The last thing is, that THIS DECISION SHOULD LEAD US TO CAST IN OUR LOT WITH GOD'S PEOPLE AS WELL AS WITH HIMSELF, for Ruth said, "Thy people shall be my people."

She might have said, "You are not well spoken of, you Jews, you Israelites; the Moabites, among whom I have lived, hate you." But, in effect, she said, "I am no Moabitess now. I am going to belong to Israel, and to be spoken against, too. They have all manner of bad things to say in Moab about Bethlehem-Judah; but I do not mind that, for I am going to be henceforth an inhabitant

of Bethlehem, and to be reckoned in the number of the Bethlehemites, for no longer am I of Moab and the Moabites."

Now, dear friend, will you thus cast in your lot with God's people; and though they are spoken against, will you be willing to be spoken against, too? I daresay that the Bethlehemites were not all that Ruth could have wished them to be. Even Naomi was not; she was too sad and sorrowful; but, still, I expect that Ruth thought that her mother-in-law was a better woman than she was herself. I have heard people find fault with the members of our churches, and say that they cannot join with them, for they are such inferior sort of people. Well, I know a great many different sorts of people; and, after all, I shall be quite content to be numbered with God's people, as I see them even in his visible church, rather than to be numbered with any other persons in the whole world. I count the despised people of God the best company I have ever met with; and I often say of this Tabernacle, as I hope members of other churches can say of their own places of worship,—

"Here my best friends, my kindred dwell,
Here God my Saviour reigns."

"Oh!" says one, "I will join the church when I can find a perfect one." Then you will never join any. "Ah!" you say, "but perhaps I may." Well, but it will not be a perfect church the moment after you have joined it, for it will cease to be perfect as soon as it receives you into its membership. I think that, if a church is such as Christ can love, it is such as I can love; and if it is such that Christ counts it as his Church, I may well be thankful to be a member of it. Christ "loved the Church, and gave himself for it;" then may I not think it an honour to be allowed to give myself to it?

Ruth was not joining a people out of whom she expected to get much. Shame on those who think to join the church for what they can get! Yet the loaves and fishes are always a bait for some people. But there was Ruth, going with Naomi to Bethlehem, and all that the townsfolk would do would be to turn out and stare at them, and say, "Is this Naomi? And pray who is this young woman that has come with her? This Naomi,—dear me! How altered she is! How worn she looks! Quite the old woman to what she was when she left us." Not much sympathy was given to them, as far as I gather from that remark; yet Ruth seemed to say, "I do not care how they treat me; they are God's people, even if they have a great many faults and imperfections, and I am going to join them." And I invite all of you who can say to us, "Your God is our God," to join with the people of God, openly, visibly, manifestly, decidedly, without any hesitancy, even though you may gain nothing by it. Perhaps you will not; but, on the other hand, you will bring a good deal to it, for that is the true spirit of Christ. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yet, in any case, cast in your lot with the people of God, and share and share alike with them.

I conclude by saying that, whatever the other Bethlehemites

might be, there was among them one notable being, and it was worth while to join the nation for the sake of union with him. Ruth found it all out by degrees. There was a near kinsman among those people, and his name was Boaz. She went to glean in his field; and, by-and-by, she was married to him. Ah! that was the reason why I cast in my lot with the people of God, for I said to myself, "There is One among them who, whatever faults they may have, is so fair and lovely that he more than makes up for all their imperfections. My Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of his people, makes them all fair in his fairness; and makes me feel that, to be poor with the poorest and most illiterate of the Church of Christ, meeting in a village barn, is an unspeakable honour, since he is among them." Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is always present wherever two or three are gathered together in his name. If his name is in the list, there may be a number of odds and ends put down with him,—members of different denominations, some queer persons, some very old people; but as long as his name is in the list, I do not mind about what others are there, put my name down. Oh, that I might have the eternal honour of having it written even at the bottom of the page beneath the name of Jesus, my Lord, the Lamb! As Boaz was there, it was enough for Ruth; and as Christ is here, that is quite enough for me. So I hope I have said sufficient to persuade you, who say that our God is your God, to come and join with us, or with some other part of Christ's Church, and so to make his people to be your people. And mind you do it at once, and in the Scriptural fashion, and God bless you in the doing of it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COVENANT BLESSINGS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 1ST, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, in the summer of 1858.

"He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant."—Psalm cxi. 5.

THIS verse occurs in one of the Hallelujah Psalms, that is, those commencing with "Praise ye the Lord." We often find the psalmist praising and extolling God; let us imitate his example. Let us do so, because we shall find it very pleasant and profitable, and because, also, it is our bounden duty. One of the highest exercises of the new life is praising God. Our doubts and fears are indications of life, for the dead man neither doubteth nor feareth. But our songs of praise are far higher demonstrations of the life within, and are more worthy fruits of a soil which has been the subject of God's husbandry, which has been ploughed by the agonies of the Saviour, and made fertile through his precious blood. My brethren, our life should be one continued psalm, with here and there a note descending very deep. Yet we should always seek to sing as we live. The stars sing as they shine, and they sing by shining. Let us sing whilst we live, and live by singing; and let our life be singing one great psalm perpetually.

There are many ways of praising God. We should do it with the lip; and grateful is the voice of song in the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. We should do it by our daily conversation; let our acts be acts of praise, as well as our words be words of praise. We should do it even by the very look of our eyes, and by the appearance of our countenance. Let not thy face be sad, let thy countenance be joyous. Sing wherever thou goest; yea, when thou art laden with trouble, let no man see it. "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face." Be thou ever glad, for it is God's commandment, through his servant, the apostle Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." And yet once more he saith, "Rejoice evermore." That we may have themes for song, David has in this Psalm mentioned many subjects. Let us attend to the subjects of the text,—the subject, I might have

said, for it is all one. This verse is the voice of experience. It is not the voice of hope, saying, "He *will* give;" but the voice of experience, "He *hath* given meat unto them that fear him;" and the voice of faith, "He will ever be mindful of his covenant."

We shall notice, first of all, *the gift:* "He hath given meat unto them that fear him;" then we shall notice *the covenant:* "He will ever be mindful of his covenant;" and then, lastly, *the character of the persons here spoken of:* "He hath given meat unto them that fear him."

I. Let us first consider THE GIFT: "He hath given meat." We are to understand this expression, of course in a twofold sense, of our necessities; the first, temporal, the other, spiritual.

First, we are to understand this expression *in a temporal sense.* Our bodies need meat; we cannot keep this mortal fabric in repair without continually providing it with food. God's children are not, by the fact of their being spiritual men, prevented from feeling natural wants; they hunger and they thirst even as do others. Sometimes, too, they are even called to suffer poverty, and know not where their next morsel of meat shall come from. Blessed be God,—

> "He that has made our heaven secure
> Will here all good provide;"—

and God's covenant relates not merely to the great and marvellous things that we need spiritually, but it is a covenant which includes in the catalogue of its gifts mercies that are food for the body, mercies for our immediate and pressing wants: "He hath given meat unto them that fear him." God has never suffered his people to starve. "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." The promise is as true under the new covenant as under the old, that our bread shall be given us, and our water shall be sure. The Lord, who feeds the ravens, will not be less careful of his people; he who supplies every insect with its food, and feeds the prowling lion in his majesty, will not suffer his own home-born children, those who are nearest his heart, to perish for lack of nutriment. "The cattle on a thousand hills are his;" so he will not allow his children to lack for their meat. He it is to whom the earth belongeth, and the fulness thereof; he will not, then, suffer his children to go without necessary supplies: "He hath given meat unto them that fear him."

Some of us are qualified to speak from experience upon this point. We may truly say that God has ever given us our meat; indeed, we have not lacked anything. Hitherto, the road has been to us like that of the Israelites when they came to the camp of the Syrians, and found the way strewn with gold, and silver, and garments. God has provided for our wants even before they have come; he has anticipated our necessities. But there are others of you who have been brought so low by poverty and affliction that you are qualified to speak in a still more emphatic fashion. You have sometimes gone, with a hungry stomach, to an empty cupboard;

you have wondered where your supplies would come from; you may even have been houseless and homeless. But ah, children of the living God, has he failed you utterly? Though he has reduced you very low, so that the last morsel was eaten from the wallet, has he not ultimately supplied your wants, and that, too, by means not miraculous, but almost so? Has he not in providence sent you things which you needed, and which you scarcely expected to receive? In answer to prayer, has he not delivered you out of your deepest tribulations? And when you were well-nigh famished, has he not spread your board with plenty when you have bent your knees before him? Yes, ye tried ones, ye have tested this text, and have proved it true. Ye sons of poverty and toil, ye have had to rest the whole weight of your daily maintenance on the promise of God, without anything to look to save that; and have you ever found him fail? No; you will unanimously bear witness that this is a great truth, "He hath given meat unto them that fear him."

But it is surprising, sometimes, how God has done it. Many a story have I heard, from the poor amongst my own flock, of how God has delivered them,—strange stories, at which some of you would laugh if I were to repeat them. There are some of them who could write "Banks of Faith" that would be as wonderful as that of William Huntington. Some of you laugh at that book, and do not believe it; but it is only because there are so many things of the same sort all put together that they seem to be incredible through their number. But there are many of the Lord's servants who could easily compose a "Bank of Faith" like Huntington's, for they have had their necessities most deep and their sorrows most poignant, and they have had their reliefs well-nigh miraculous, so that, if God had thrust his hand out of the clouds, and handed down bread and clothing for them, their deliverance would not have been more apparently from his hand than it has been in the way whereby his providence has supplied their wants. They can say that he hath done it, and he hath done it marvellously, and constantly, too: "He hath given meat unto them that fear him." Why, if the child of God were in such a position that the earth could not yield him bread, God would open the windows of heaven, and rain manna from thence again. If a Christian could be placed in such a position that the common course of providence could not serve his end, God would change the nature of everything rather than break his promise; he would reverse all the seasons, and unloose the very bonds of creation itself, and let the laws of nature run riot, rather than suffer one of his promises to fail, or one of his children to lack. "He hath given meat"—and he will ever do so—"unto them that fear him."

But we are to understand this expression chiefly *in a spiritual sense.* God's people need spiritual meat. I was talking, the other day, to a minister, who certainly is not noted for his great soundness in the faith. He was making a joke to me about certain people in his congregation, who said they could not feed under him. "There is Mrs. So-and-so," he said, "who tells me that she cannot get a bit of food out of my ministry. I do not know how it is," he continued,

jocularly, "for I do not think you say half as many good things as I do; but yet the old woman cannot feed upon my sermons." He laughed at the idea of feeding under a ministry, but there is a good deal more in the expression than many think; there is much meant by it that cannot be expressed by any other word. It is only the true Christian who can understand its meaning. He hears a very eloquent discourse delivered; "but," says he, "I have got no food out of it." Or he hears a very learned discourse; "but," he says, "I cannot feed under that." There is a peculiar style of preaching, and a peculiar style of hearing, which can only be described as a "feeding preaching" and a "feeding hearing"; in which the child of God feels that, though he may have learned little that is fresh, yet still his soul has been receiving spiritual food, and he can go on his way rejoicing.

And, my brethren, the house of God is one of the principal places where he feeds his people; and those to whom he has committed the solemn work of the ministry should be very careful that there is something in what they say that the child of God can feed on. The child of God can never feed under a ministry unless he hears the doctrines of grace, and listens to the things of the kingdom of God.

"Our minister preached a fine metaphysical sermon, the other day," says one; "I never heard such a clear distinction as he made between that point and the other." But the child of God goes out, and says, "Well, I don't want any of his metaphysics; there was no food in the sermon for my soul. I went there to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ; I went to be taught something for my soul's welfare, something about the heaven that is to come, or the hell that is to be shunned; I wanted to hear something about communion with Christ, something about the eternal covenant; but there was nothing of the kind in the whole discourse." Sermons need to be instructive; there should be real teaching in them concerning the things of the kingdom. "Why," said a good writer once, "if you were to hear six lectures by a geologist, he would be the poorest geologist in the world if he did not give you some clear ideas concerning geology; but you may hear sixty sermons from many preachers without getting any notion of their system of divinity." It is the glory of the men of this age that they have no system of divinity; they have cast creeds to the wind; they have no forms in which they can state systematically the truths which they believe. The reason is, because they have nothing to state. No man will avoid having a system when he has certain definite principles. It is impossible for a man to believe the truths in God's Word without insensibly to himself forming a creed of some sort or other. It is the fashion to talk about giving up creeds, but creeds are only the orderly way of stating God's truth. If we hold the truths themselves, we shall always be able to set them out in some fashion, and to communicate our knowledge to others, so that, in a given number of discourses, our hearers will be pretty tolerably acquainted with our ideas of the truth of God. "He hath given meat unto them that fear him" under the ministry. Sometimes God gives your

minister such a gift of utterance that, if he were to preach for a week, you would listen to him. There are periods when your own minister gives no food to you, though he does to others, because he has to care for different members of God's family. But there are other periods when the Lord seems to have given him such bountiful gifts that he has let fall handfuls to be gathered by the gleaners as did the man Boaz, and you pick them up, and feast thereon, and are satisfied.

There is another way in which God gives food unto his children; that is, in the Bible. This precious volume is the greatest granary of spiritual food for God's people. Would to God ye read it more! With your magazines, and newspapers, and tracts on this, that, and the other subject, ye have too much covered up this ancient Bible, this grand old Book, this emporium of all wisdom, this sum of all knowledge. Ay, Christian, if you want spiritual meat, study a chapter of God's Word. If you want to have food for your souls, give up for a little while reading the works of even the best of men, and take a Psalm for the theme of your study,—or if not a whole Psalm, take one verse of it; take it for your daily meditation; masticate and digest it all day long, and so you will find meat for "them that fear him." Let me just say a word or two of caution to you on this point. When you read the Bible, do not think that you will get spiritual food out of it simply by reading. I know some people who make a point of reading two chapters of the Bible every day. They do so as a sort of mental exercise; they simply run their eyes down the page, and, after all, do not know a word they have been reading. That is not the way to feed upon God's Word; we cannot truly feed except we understand and believe what we read. In reading the Scripture, do as Luther advised. He says, "When I get a promise, I treat it as if it were a tree in my garden. I know there is rich fruit on it; and if I cannot at once get it, I shake the tree backwards and forwards by prayer and meditation, until at last the fruit drops into my hand." Do you the same. Read a short portion of Scripture; turn it over and over again in your meditation all day long; and then, if you cannot get anything out of it, I will tell you a way whereby you will be sure to get something. Go down on your knees before the passage, and say, "O Lord, open this passage to me; give me something out of it; teach me to understand it;" and you will not be long before God refreshes you with dainty portions from the tables of paradise, and makes your soul glad with choice morsels of royal dainties, wherewith he feeds his own chosen ones.

But there is another way of getting spiritual meat, even when we have not our Bible with us. The Lord sometimes gives meat "unto them that fear him," by bringing Jesus Christ home to them, without the use of the Word, simply in meditation and communion. You know, beloved, after all, that what a child of God feeds upon is Jesus Christ. When the Jews went to the temple, they did not eat the tongs and fire-shovels; they did not eat the garments of the priests, and the bells and the pomegranates; they valued all these things, for they were made according to God's orders, and therefore

they thought them precious But they did, at the appointed season, eat the paschal lamb. So the Christian does not eat the doctrines of the Word; he feeds on Christ. He loves the truth, he loves the ordinances, he loves everything in the Bible for Christ's sake; but his food is the Lamb himself. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, is the real food for all the Lord's chosen. And are there not most sweet and happy moments, when the spirit is carried aloft in blessed communion, when Jesus Christ seems very present and very precious, when we lean our head on his bosom, when we seem to feel the very beating of his heart, and to realize his love for us, when we lose ourselves in him, and almost forget that we have a separate existence, being—

> "Plunged in his Godhead's deepest sea,
> And lost in his immensity"?

I was much struck, the other evening, at a prayer-meeting, by the prayer of one of our brethren, which came home to my heart. When he prayed, he said, "O Lord, give me Mary's place,—

> "'Oh that I could for ever sit
> With Mary at the Master's feet;
> Be this my happy choice:
> My only care, delight, and bliss,
> My joy, my heaven on earth, be this,
> To hear the Bridegroom's voice.'"

He prayed that he might have Mary's part, and always sit at the feet of Jesus. But, by-and-by, the good man's fervour increased, and in his prayer he said, "No, my Master, I have not asked enough of thee. Mary's place is too low for me, if I may have a better one. Lift me up higher, Lord; give me John's place.

> "'Oh! that I might with favoured John,
> For ever lean my head upon
> The bosom of my Lord.'"

As he pleaded for that higher degree of communion between his soul and Christ, I thought, "Surely, now you have asked enough." But, suddenly rising another flight on the wings of communion, like the eagle taking its last soar into the skies, he said, "No, Lord, John's place doth not suffice me. Thou hast lifted me from thy feet to thy bosom, now lift me from thy bosom to thy lips." Then, quoting the words of the spouse, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine," he sweetly paraphrased it thus, "Let the lip of my petitioning meet the lip of thy benediction; let the lip of my praise meet the lip of thine acceptance; so shall the kiss of love be consummated, and my joy be complete." Ay, and when we also are favoured to go through these various stages of fellowship with Christ; to go from the foot to the bosom, and from the bosom to the lip; to go from the mere learner, and to be a friend and companion; and then to go higher still,—to be lifted up, and to feel our fellowship with Christ, by standing as high as he does, and our lips being on his lips; it is there that the

child of God almost insensibly receives strength, and, like Elijah smitten by the angel, he rises up, and finds his meat baked upon the coals, and eats thereof, and lives upon it for forty days. This is indeed a most precious mode of feeding for our souls.

But, somehow or other, God doth give meat unto his children, and will never leave them to be famished. You have often noticed, I daresay, that, when one means of feeding fails for God's children, others become available and effective. You are sick, and cannot be fed by the public ministry, you cannot go out to hear sermons; so God's Word becomes more precious to you. Or, you have nobody to read to you, and your sight has failed; generally, then, communion becomes more precious. One way or other, God will have his children fed.

II. We will now consider THE COVENANT: "He will ever be mindful of his covenant."

God has made many covenants at divers times, and none of these covenants has he ever broken. Let me briefly mention these covenants. There was the covenant with Adam, the covenant of works: "Obey me, and thou shalt live; disobey me, and thou shalt die." That covenant God did not break. He did not subject Adam to pain or misery until he had first broken the covenant, and so became the inevitable heir of suffering. God made a covenant with Noah that the waters should no more go over the earth; and the rainbow, the sign of that covenant, has lit up the sky ever since at various intervals, and the earth has not been drowned with a flood a second time. He made a covenant with Abraham, that he would give the land of Canaan to be the heritage of his seed; and that covenant hath he kept, neither hath he altered the thing that went out of his lips. He made a covenant with David, that his seed should sit upon his throne; and that covenant he kept.

But the covenant here referred to is a better covenant than all these, it is the covenant of grace. That is a sweet subject to preach upon. Suffer me to go back to the time when this covenant was made. It is older than the oldest things that man has ever seen; the covenant of grace is more ancient than the everlasting hills. It was made by God with Christ for us before all worlds were created. God had foreseen that man would be a sinner. Jesus Christ and his Father were determined to save him, and therefore a covenant was made between them. God the Son on his part stipulated that he would suffer all the punishment which all the elect deserved to suffer, that he would offer a perfect righteousness on their behalf, and pay all the demands of God's justice. God the Father on his part covenanted that all the elect, being redeemed by the blood of Christ, should most certainly be accepted and saved. That is the covenant of which God is ever mindful.

Some people believe in a rickety kind of covenant, which I never could find in the Bible, a covenant that has conditions in it which you and I are to fulfil. If there was such a covenant as that, it would not be a covenant of grace, but of works. If the covenant of grace were made with men,—with those that should be saved, on condition of their believing,—it would be as impossible for any

man to be saved on that condition as it would be on the condition of obeying, since faith is no more possible to unaided man than is perfect obedience. Faith in Christ is as difficult a thing, to a man dead in trespasses and sins, as is perfect obedience to every command of God. The covenant of grace is a covenant without any conditions on our part whatever, of any sort, in any shape, in any form, or any fashion. The covenant, in fact, is not made between us and God; it is made between God and Christ, our Representative. All the conditions of that covenant are fulfilled, so that there are none left for us to fulfil. The conditions were that Christ should suffer, and he has suffered; that Christ should obey, and he has obeyed. All that is done; and all that is now standing is the unconditional covenant, that God will give to all his elect, though dead in sin, power to live; that he will give to them, though black, perfect cleansing in the fountain filled with blood; that he will give to them, though naked, a robe of perfect righteousness; that he will ultimately accept them to dwell with him for ever in glory everlasting. This covenant, on which our hopes are built, this glorious covenant, is—

"Signed, and sealed, and ratified,
In all things ordered well."

Will God ever forget it? No; "He will ever be mindful of his covenant," in everything that it guarantees, and towards every person who is interested in it. God will not suffer one single promise of the covenant to be unfulfilled, nor one single blessing of the covenant to be kept back. Every iota, and jot, and tittle of the covenanted purpose of God shall be fulfilled, and everything which he has promised to his people in the covenant, and which Christ hath bought for his people through the covenant, shall most infallibly be received by his people. As for the persons interested therein, not one of them shall be forgotten. If in the covenant, they shall most assuredly be saved, despite every attack of the devil, and all their own wickedness, and any casuality, so-called, of providence, or whatsoever may happen; all who are in the covenant must and shall be gathered in.

The Arminian says there are some in the covenant who tumble out of it; that God has chosen some men,—that he justifies them, that he accepts them, and then turns them out of his family. The Arminian holds the unnatural, cruel, barbarous idea, that a man may be God's child, and then God may unchild him because he does not behave himself. The idea is revolting even to human sensibility. If our children sin, they are our children still; though chastened and punished, yet never do they cease to be numbered amongst our family. There are many of God's children who have gone astray from him, and been chastened for it; but it were an idea too barbarous to suppose that God would unchild his child for any sin he doth commit. He keepeth fast his covenant; he loveth them, sinners though they be. He keepeth them from running riotously into sin; and when, sometimes, they go astray, as the best of them will, still his loving heart towards them is

unchangeably the same. I do not serve the god of the Arminians at all; I have nothing to do with him, and I do not bow down before the Baal they have set up; he is not my god, nor shall he ever be, I fear him not, nor tremble at his presence. A mutable god may be the god for them; he is not the god for me. My Jehovah changeth not. The god that saith to-day, and denieth to-morrow; that justifieth to-day, and condemns the next; the god that hath children of his own one day, and lets them be the children of the devil the next, is no relation to my God in the least degree. He may be the relation of Ashtaroth or Baal, but Jehovah never was nor can be his name. Jehovah changeth not; he knoweth no shadow of turning. If he hath set his heart upon a man, he will love him to the end. If he hath chosen him, he hath not chosen him for any merit of his own; therefore he will never cast him away for any demerit of his own. If he hath begotten him unto a lively hope, he will not suffer him to fall away and perish. That were a breaking of every promise, and an abrogation of the covenant. If one dear child of God might fall away, then might all. If one of those for whom the Saviour died might be damned, then would the Saviour's blood be utterly void and vain. If one of those whom he hath called according to his purpose might perish, then would his purpose be null and void. But, children of God, you may lay your heads upon the covenant, and say, with Dr. Watts,—

> "Then should the earth's old pillars shake,
> And all the wheels of nature break,
> Our steady souls should fear no more
> Than solid rocks when billows roar."

III. Now I close by noticing THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS HERE REFERRED TO: "them that fear him." Those who fear the Lord are in the covenant of his grace.

The anxious enquirer or the young convert oftentimes says to the minister, "Sir, how can I know that I am elect?" And the usual answer is, "You have nothing to do with that; you may think of that matter by-and-by." Begging the gentleman's pardon, that is not true. A sinner has everything to do with it. Instead of having nothing to do with election, he has everything in the world to do with it. But it is said that he need not trouble his mind about it. Perhaps he should not; but he will, and it is no source of comfort to tell him that he ought not. If I have a toothache, it is poor comfort for a physician to tell me that I ought not to have it. So, when a sinner is troubled about the doctrine of election, it is poor comfort to tell him he ought not to be troubled. The best way is to go fairly through the whole question, and say to him, "Do you fear the Lord? Then, so sure as you are a living man, you are elect. You have the fear of the Lord before your eyes; then you need have no doubt but that your name is in the covenant." None have feared the Lord who were not first loved by the Lord. Never did one come, and cast himself at the feet of Jesus simply because he feared the penalty of sin; and none ever came to embrace the loving skirts of the Redeemer because he feared lest he should go astray, without

having been first called, and chosen, and made faithful. No, the fear of God in the heart is the proof of being God's elect one. If we fear him, we may believe that he will ever give meat unto us, and that he will always keep his covenant towards us which he has made for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"But," says one, "how am I to know whether I am elect?" Beloved, thou canst not know it by any outward profession. Thou mayest be of any church in the world, or of no church, and yet be one of God's elect. Nor canst thou know it even by the sentiments which thou receivest as being true, for thou mayest know truth, and yet not have truth in thy soul; thou mayest be orthodox in thy head, and heterodox in thy heart; thou mayest believe everything, and yet be cast away at last. The only way whereby thou canst judge thyself is this: dost thou fear the Lord? Dost thou reverence his name and his Sabbath? Hast thou trembled at his Word? Hast thou cast away thy self-righteousness at his command? And hast thou come to him, and taken Christ to be thine All-in-all? I do not ask thee whether thou fearest hell; many fear hell who fear not God. Dost thou fear to offend a loving Father? Dost thou fear lest thou shouldst go astray from God's commandments? Dost thou cry to him,—

"Saviour, keep me lest I wander"?

Dost thou ask him to preserve thee? And canst thou honestly say that, if thou couldst be perfect, thou wouldst be; that thou desirest to be freed from sin; that thou hatest every false way? And is it thy daily groaning to be set free from guilt, and to be wholly surrendered to the Crucified? Lastly, canst thou say this after me,—

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ's kind arms I fall:
He is my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all"?

Then you are elect; then you are justified; then you are accepted; and you have no more reason to doubt your acceptance and your election than you will have when you stand before the throne of God, amid the blazing lustre of eternal glory. You are elect; and you always were elect. God hath chosen you; your fearing him is the evidence of it; and your believing in Christ, without any righteousness of your own, is a proof positive that you were chosen of God before the foundation of the world.

Now what shall I say in conclusion? There are some of you who fear not God. Alas, for you, my brethren, that you should be in a state so utterly miserable and pitiable, without the fear of God before your eyes! Oh, that God would teach you to fear him! Oh, that he would break your hearts, and so make you feel your ruined state as to bring you to his feet to receive the perfect righteousness of Christ, then would you fear him, and then might you rejoice that he would give you meat, and keep you in his covenant.

Methinks I hear one say, "I am a great sinner, I am in the very front rank of the army of guilt. I have verily transgressed and

gone astray from the Most High. Tell me, did Jesus die for me? Did he die,—not as some say he died, for all men,—but in that special sense which ensures salvation?" I will answer thee. Canst thou say, "I am a sinner," not as a kind of idle compliment that most men pass when they say they are sinners, and do not mean what the word implies, for they no more mean that they are sinners than that they are horses; but do you really believe that you are sinners deserving God's wrath and the fire of hell for ever? Then the Lord Jesus died for you; and "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." If the word is to be understood in the sense in which Hart uses it when he says,—

> "A sinner is a sacred thing,
> The Holy Ghost hath made him so;"—

if you feel you are a sinner in that sense, Christ died for you. But you say, "I wish he had set my name down in the book, that I might read it." Why, my friend, if he had done so, you would believe it was intended for somebody else! If the book contained the name of Smith, in such a street, Smith would declare that there were so many Smiths, that it could not be meant for himself; and if you could read your name, you would still doubt that it could, by any possibility, be a description of you, since another person might bear the same title. But since it says "sinners", Satan himself cannot beat you out of that. God has taught you what the term "sinner" means, and Satan cannot unteach you that. Are you, then, a sinner, fully, wholly, in all the black sense of the word? Then Christ died for you. Cast yourself upon that truth, Christ died for sinners.

"But," say you, "Sir, if I were a little better, I might believe that he died for me." I should not; for he died for sinners. Or you say, "If I were a saint, I might believe that he died for me." I should not; for he died for sinners. Only prove thyself a sinner, and thou hast proved that Christ died for thee; only be thou sure that thou art a sinner, that thou hast revolted from God, and that thou knowest it; only confess with thine heart thy trangressions, and take this title to thyself, and thou mayest believe that Jesus died for thee.

Let me give you a lesson in logic,—not from Whateley nor Watts, but from the logic of Faith. It is extraordinary how different are the conclusions of Faith from those of Reason. Once Reason came along, and heard a man cry, "I am guilty, guilty." She stopped, and said, "The man is guilty; God condemns the guilty, therefore this man will be condemned." She went away, and left the man condemned, and ruined, and quivering with fear. Faith came, and heard the selfsame cry, rendered more bitter by the cruel syllogism of Reason. Faith stopped; she said, "The man is guilty; but Christ died for the guilty, therefore the man will be saved;" and her logic was right; the man lifted up his head, and rejoiced. Reason came one day, and saw a man naked, and she said, "He hath not on a wedding garment; can naked souls appear before the bar

of God? Should they have a place at the supper of the Lamb? The man is naked; he must be cast out, for naked ones cannot enter heaven!" Then Faith came by, and said, "The man is naked; Christ wrought a robe of righteousness; he must have made it for the naked; he would not have made it for those who have a robe of their own. That robe is for the naked man, and he shall stand in it before God." And her logic was right and just. The other might seem strictly according to rule, but this was better still. Reason one day heard a man say that he was very good and righteous. She saw him go up to the temple, and heard him pray, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men," and Reason said, "That man is better than others, and he will be accepted." But she argued wrongly; for, lo, he went out; and a poor sinner by his side, who could only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," went down to his house justified, while the proud Pharisee went on his way disregarded. The logic of Faith is to argue white from black, whereas the logic of Reason argues white from white. Luther says, "Once upon a time, the devil came to me, and said, 'Martin Luther, you are a great sinner, and you will be damned.' 'Stop, stop,' said I, 'one thing at a time; I am a great sinner, it is true, though you have no right to tell me of it. I confess it; what next?' 'Therefore you will be damned.' 'That is not good reasoning. It is true I am a great sinner, but it is written, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" therefore I shall be saved. Now go your way.' So I drove off the devil with his own sword, and he went away mourning because he could not cast me down by calling me a sinner." I have a right to believe that Jesus Christ died for me, and I cast myself wholly upon him. Do thou the same, poor disconsolate one, for thou hast nothing of thine own to depend upon; but thou, O great, and good, and rich man, I have naught to say to thee!

"Not the righteous,
Sinners, Jesus came to save."

While thou hast a rag of thine own, thou shalt never have Christ's robe. Go thy way, thy righteousness shall prove like the shirt of Hercules, when it burnt him, and did eat his flesh away; though thou gloriest in it, it shall be the winding-sheet of thy soul for ever. But if thou hast nothing, and art poor, and penniless, and miserable, reduced to utter spiritual destitution and poverty, in God's name I preach to thee the gospel; Christ died for thee, and thou shalt not perish. God will not punish Christ for us, and then punish us afterwards. He will not demand the payment first at his hands, and then again at ours. He is not unjust to punish first the Scapegoat, the Surety, the Substitute, and then to punish you. Christ was your Substitute; he bore your guilt, he carried your iniquities upon his head; your sins were numbered upon him, and your punishment was laid upon him. Go your way; you can never be punished. Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven. Rejoice in pardon bought with blood; be glad, be satisfied, be happy, even till thou diest, and then thou shalt be happy for ever.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A SONG AND A SOLACE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 8TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, May 1st, 1881.

"Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee."—Job x. 12, 13.

BEFORE I speak upon these two verses, I will read the four which precede them, that you may note the connection in which they are found. Job is in great trouble, in sore distress of soul; his heart is very heavy, and his unfriendly friends are casting salt into his wounds instead of trying to heal them. In his distress, he turns to his God, and appeals to him in this fashion (beginning at the 8th verse): "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again? Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews." Then follows our text: "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee."

You see that Job is appealing to the pity of God, and this is the form of his argument: "Thou art my Creator; be my Preserver. Thou hast made me; do not break me. Thou art dealing very hardly with me, I am almost destroyed beneath the pressure of thy hand; yet remember that I am thine own creature. Weak and frail as I am, I am the creation of thy hand; therefore, despise not thine own work. Whatever I am, with the exception of my sin, thou hast made me what I am; 'tis thou who hast brought me into my present condition; consider, then, O God, what a poor, frail thing I am, and stay thy hand, and do not utterly crush my spirit."

This is a wise prayer, a right and proper argument for a creature to use with the Creator; and when Job goes further still, and, in the language of our text, addresses God not only as his Creator, but as his Benefactor, and mentions the great blessings that he had

received from God, his argument still holds good: "Do not, Lord, change thy method of dealing with me; thou hast given me life, thou hast shown me special favour, thou hast hitherto preserved me; cast me not away from thy presence, dismiss me not from thy service, let not thy tender mercies fail, but do unto me now and in days to come according as thou hast done unto me in the days that are past."

In speaking about these two verses, I am going to use them in two senses; the first in one sense and the second in another, but both and each of them in its own true meaning, so far as I understand it. First, here is *a song for bright days:* "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." Secondly, here is *a solace for dark nights:* "And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee."

I. First, then, let us use the former part of our text as A SONG FOR BRIGHT DAYS: "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit."

Whatever we have received that is good, has come to us from God as a matter of pure favour; certainly we have deserved nothing at his hands but displeasure, and everything short of death and hell is a mercy, and a thing for which to magnify the goodness of God. In this first portion of our text, there is a mention of three blessings that must never be forgotten. The great charter of God's bounty includes three notable things which he has granted to us:— life, favour, and his visitation which hath preserved our spirit.

Now, then, ye joyful ones, unite with me while we first *bless God for granting us life.* To a Christian man, life is a blessing; in itself, considered alone, it is a blessing; but to the ungodly man it may turn out to be a curse, for it would have been better for that man if he had never been born. But to a godly man like Job, it is a great mercy even to have an existence. Blessed be the Lord who brought us into the world, and gave breath to these lungs, and the flowing life to these veins. Blessed be God for having made us. Sometimes, as I gaze upon the world in springtime, or in the summer, it appears to me that it is a great happiness to all nature simply to exist. Look at the lovely lily, as it stands quite still, and never speaks, it seems in silence to praise God by its beauty. But a Christian man should go beyond a mere flower, he ought to feel that it is a great favour to be made by God. The man who knows that his eternal future is secured by the unfailing grace of God may for ever praise the Lord who has given him life.

I find that, in the Hebrew, this word "life" is in the plural: "Thou hast granted me *lives;*" and, blessed be God, we who believe in Jesus have not only this natural life, which we share in common with all men, but the Holy Spirit has begotten in the hearts of believers a new life infinitely higher than mere natural life, a life which makes us akin to Christ, joint-heirs with him of the eternal inheritance which he is keeping for us in heaven. A Christian man is lifted into quite another sphere of action; he is no longer in the carnal but in the spiritual realm, and therefore he understands things that are hidden from carnal eyes, and he lives in the midst of

a world into which the unregenerate cannot possibly come. An unconverted man cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; he cannot even see it until he is born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit; but once he is born again, he can bless God for giving him a second life infinitely better than the first one. Our wellbeing is a far higher thing than simply our being; the new creation is vastly superior to the first creation, good as that was; and the life of God in the soul is infinitely above the mere ordinary life of man.

Let us praise God, then, for life, and especially for this higher life if it is ours. What a joy it is to live in this respect! You know that, when a person is very sick and ill, and can scarcely turn in bed, or lift a hand, when every sense is deprived of enjoyment, and every vein or nerve becomes a road for the hot feet of pain to travel over, then life is hardly to be called life; but when God graciously raises us up from sickness, we ought to bless him for giving us life again, prolonged, restored, enjoyable life; and when the heart itself is sick, when the spirit flags, and the soul is ready to burst with inward grief, then the spiritual life seems scarcely to be life; but when, through the mercy of God, the Holy Spirit comes to us, and applies the pardoning blood of Jesus to our heart and conscience, and whispers peace to our troubled spirit, so that we can read our title clear to mansions in the skies, then our spiritual life is life indeed; we run, we leap, we fly; we would scarcely exchange for the bliss of angels the joy which the spiritual life brings to us at such times, and we bless and magnify the Lord who hath granted us this higher life, this life so blessed, so superlatively blessed that, even here below, it makes us anticipate and realize some of the glory of heaven itself. Are you, my brother, my sister, enjoying these lives? Do you feel that it is your privilege to be one with Christ, and to live because he lives, and do you really know that you have received this wondrous blessing? Oh, then, sing unto the Lord as long as you live, for it is the living, even the living in Zion who shall praise him as we do this day! Let this be one of your songs in this bright day of your happy experience; let the joy of your heart ring it out in the words of our text: "Thou hast granted me life."

Next, we have to *praise God for granting us favour*. I should be quite unable to tell you to the full all that is wrapped up in that word "favour." Favour from God! It is a great word in the original, a word big with meaning, for it means the love of God. What the expression "the love of God" fully means, we cannot tell, for Charles Wesley truly wrote,—

"God only knows the love of God."

God loves immeasurably. The force and extent of true love never can be calculated; it is a passion that cannot be measured by degrees as the temperature can be recorded on the thermometer; it is something that exceedeth and overfloweth all measurement, for a man giveth all his heart when he truly loveth. So is it with God; he setteth no bound to his love. When he loves a man, the great infinity of his being flows out towards his chosen. How much God

loves you, my brother, my sister, if you are indeed one of his elect and redeemed people, it would not be possible even for an angel to calculate. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote,—

> "The love of Jesus—what it is,
> None but his loved ones know;"—

but I correct the poet; for even his loved ones cannot know it, except in that sense which Paul intended when he wrote to the Ephesians, "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." We might rightly paraphrase Job's words, and say, "Thou hast granted me life and love." Oh, what wondrous words to put together, life and love! Life without God's love is death; but put God's love with it, and then what a song we ought to send up to his throne if we feel that he has given us both spiritual life and infinite love.

The word "favour", however, means not only love; but, as we ordinarily use it, it means some special form of grace and goodness. I know that there are some people who never will admit that God favours anyone, or that he has any special love toward some more than toward others. They do not like that hymn which Dr. Watts wrote; I heard one alter the verse,—

> "Let those refuse to sing
> That never knew our God;
> But favourites of the heavenly King
> May speak their joys abroad."

The gentleman did not like the word "favourites", so he gave out the line,—

> "But *subjects* of the heavenly King."

I let him sing it in that fashion, for I thought that very likely he was only a subject, but I sang the line correctly, because I knew that I was one of the King's favourites, and I was resolved to rejoice in that fact. So I am at this moment, for I know that I have received special favour from God, and that there are some who have not received such favour and mercy. If, at this hour, any one of you is a child of God, it is because God has done more for you than he has done for others. If there be a difference between you and others, somebody made that difference; and whoever made it ought to be honoured and praised for it. Did you make it yourself? Shall I put the crown on your head? Why, if you are right-hearted, you will cry, "Nay, nay; it is God who hath made me to differ from others, it is his grace which has been given to me, to bring me out of the darkness in which others have been left." So, whatever others may think or say, we, at any rate, believe in that special form of grace which may be called favour: "Thou hast granted me life and favour." The Lord has given peculiar favour unto his own chosen people, and this makes them sing a song that

rises above all the others: "He hath not dealt so with any nation." "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." Let them praise the Lord with thanksgiving evermore, and if you, dear friends, belong to that privileged company, praise ye the Lord.

By the word "favour" is also meant grace in all the shapes which it assumes, so Job's words might be rendered, "Thou hast granted me life and grace." Come, my brothers and sisters, if you can say this, just think over all that it means. "Thou hast granted me the grace and favour of thine electing love and of thy redeeming love, the grace of effectual calling, the grace of regeneration, the grace of justification, the grace of adoption, the grace of perseverance until this day, the grace of sanctification," (for all this is grace,) "thou hast given it, thou hast granted it of thy free favour, and granted it to me." "I do not know whether God has granted this grace to me," says one. Well, my dear brother, you cannot sing while you doubt this; but if, through faith in Jesus, you know that God has given you life and grace, sing away, sing despite all that might stop you, for this is a mercy which should for ever monopolize the music of everyone who has been thus favoured of God: "Thou hast granted me life and grace." I do not know what any other person in this place might say; but if no one else said it, I should be compelled, in the courts of the Lord's house, and in the midst of his people, to say, "I bless his name for giving me life and grace; I am altogether undeserving of such mercy, yet he has favoured me with his goodness, so that I cannot do otherwise than feel overwhelmed by his grace." I do not know whether you can all say the same, but I feel persuaded that there are scores, hundreds, yea, even thousands of you who might stand up, and say, "We bless God that, though unworthy of his notice, he has granted us life and grace."

Now let us dwell, for a minute or two, on the third blessing of this divine grant: "*and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.*" There is a wonderful range of meaning in those words, but Job no doubt first refers to the providence of God by which he makes, as it were, a visitation of all the world, and especially of his own people. As a man, who possesses a large estate, if he be wise, goes round and looks over all his cattle and his servants and his fields, and makes a visitation to see whether all is going well, for he knows that the master's eye doeth much, so doth God visit the earth, and inspect it, and care for the creatures whom he hath formed to live upon it. "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." The Lord keeps a watchful eye upon the whole universe. He leadeth out the stars, calling them all by their names, and nightly marshals their serried ranks. He counteth even the sparrows, so that not one of them falleth upon the ground without his knowledge. It has been the providence of God that has preserved us hitherto, so let us bless him for this great favour.

Some of us have had very special providential deliverances; we will not mention them to-night, because they are too many. It has been well said, "He that watches providence shall never be without a providence to watch." I am sure it is so. You, who have had

your eyes divinely opened, must have seen an act of God's gracious providence every day. Some will only see God's providence in deliverance from a terrible catastrophe,—such as an escape from fire, or from a railway accident, or something of that unusual and startling kind; but, indeed, the providence of God is watching over us just as much when we sit in our home, or sleep in our beds, or go about our daily duties. People used to say of Dr. Gill, my illustrious predecessor, that they could easily find him, for he was always in his study, and someone remarked, "At any rate, he is in a safe place there; a man is out of harm's way when he is studying at home." It so happened that the Doctor was called away from his study, one day, when a high wind blew down a stack of chimneys, which crashed right through the house into his study, and must have killed him if he had been in the place where he was usually sitting. Truly, it is the providence of God that preserves our lives as much when we are at home as if we were out on the vast deep when it is tossed with tempests.

Now, brethren, is it not wonderful that some of us are alive at all? Have not most of you reason to praise God for some very singular instances of his guardian care which has preserved you in being until this day? Refuse not to sing to God the song of thanksgiving which is his due. Prolonged life should beget continual gratitude, and votive offerings of joyful praise should ascend unto the Most High.

Oh, but that is only the beginning of the meaning of Job's words, "Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." God hath visited those of us who are his people in other ways besides the watching of his providence. Let me mention some of them. He has visited some of us with correction, and we do not like that form of visitation. We have been smitten heavily with his rod till all our bones have ached, and the blows have been so severe that they have left black bruises; or we have lost friend after friend, or we have been corrected by the scandal and the slander of wicked men, or in some way or other God has used man as the rod in his hand to chasten us. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Look back, and see whether you cannot say to God, "Thy visitation in correction hath preserved my spirit." Can you not say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word"? There have been times, in the lives of some of us, when nothing but affliction could have saved us from falling into gross sin. We should have been carried away with pride, but we suffered from grievous depression of spirit, and so could not afford to be proud. There have been times when we should have been exalted above measure, but the thorn in the flesh was graciously given to us, a messenger of Satan came to buffet us, and so we were preserved in the hour of temptation.

There are some, whom God will yet permit to be rich, who would not have been capable of managing so much money to the Lord's honour and glory if they had not for a while had to live on short

commons. The very thing we regret most in providence will probably be that in which we shall rejoice most in eternity. You know, in this world, we see the wrong side of the carpet that is being woven. We are like Hannah More in the carpet manufactory, when she said to the workman, "I cannot see any design; there seem to be a great number of loose pieces of wool, but I cannot perceive any pattern or order." "No, madam," said the man, "of course you cannot, because you are standing on the wrong side of the carpet; if you will come to the other side, you will then see it all." We are on the wrong side at present, but God will take us to the other side by-and-by, and then we shall each one say, "O my Lord, how wrongly did I judge thee! How little did I understand thy dealings with me! I thought thy visitation would have crushed me, but it preserved my spirit."

There are other visitations, however, such as the visitations of consolation. Oh, how sweet those are to the soul when in trouble! You and I must have known times when our spirits have gone down below zero, when no earthly friend could comfort us, and we could not think of any source of consolation for ourselves. Just then, some unnoticed promise of the Word of God has dropped into our soul with charming effect. It was, perhaps, but a sentence of half a dozen words, but they came from God the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and they were so powerfully applied to our spirit that we said, "I do not mind what burden I have to bear, for I know that Christ's grace will be sufficient for me. I cannot tell what the divine will may be concerning me, or however dark and dreary may be the valley of the shadow of death through which I shall have to pass, but God's rod and staff are evidently with me, and they will comfort me in the most trying hour, and my Lord himself will surely bring me through all my tribulations." Cannot some of you say that your blessed Saviour, who has suffered for you, and who understands all your griefs, has come and bound up your broken hearts, and given you unfailing comfort when you were in such sorrow that you feared you would have lost your reason, and perhaps even taken your own life? But here you are, the living to praise him, and to say, "Thy visitation by way of comfort hath preserved my spirit."

Once more, how sweet are the visitations of God in communion! Have you not sometimes had such communion with your Lord, during a sermon, that you have said, "My steps had well-nigh slipped, but now my Lord has come near unto me, and he has made me to stand so firmly that nothing can cast me down." Or perhaps you have gone upstairs to your room when you have been weighed down under very heavy grief, and you have told it all to Jesus, whispered it all into the ear that never wearies of his people's complaints; and, after a while, you have come down, and you have felt, "Now I do not mind what happens, I can even face a frowning world, for Jesus Christ's visitation hath preserved my spirit." I am sure also that many of us can say that, at the Lord's table, in the breaking of bread, our spirits have been so refreshed that we could go out into our daily callings, or back to our domestic griefs, and

feel, "It really does not matter now; I can shoulder my cross, for I have seen the Crucified; I can bear my own sorrows, for I have had fellowship with him in his sorrows; I could even die for his sake, for I have entered into fellowship with his death."

"Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." I want you, my brother, my sister, to pray for that visitation to-night. Ask the Lord Jesus not only to pay a visit to your soul, but to come and stop with you. You have only to open the door of your heart, and he will come in. That is what he said even to lukewarm Laodicea: "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." So open wide the door at once. You say, "But there is nothing within; it is only an empty house." That does not matter to him, for he will bring with him the provisions on which he will sup with you, and you with him. Open the door, give him heart-room, say, "Come in, thou blessed Saviour, wherefore standest thou without?" He saith to you who are slow to admit him, "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Oh, keep not the door of your heart closed against him any longer! At least be willing that he should enter, pray that he may enter, cry to him to enter, and he will surely come in to you, and you shall have such a blessed season that you shall say, "Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit."

I have it deeply impressed upon me—so I must say it—that there are some of you who had better get a good feast to-night, for you have a great sorrow coming. You had better enter into close fellowship with Christ to-night, for the dark clouds of trouble are gathering about you. The tempest lowers, and if your ship is not prepared to weather the storm by having Christ on board, it will go ill with you. Avail yourselves of this present opportunity of a visit from Christ. Creep to the cross, clasp it to your heart, hide yourselves there, for no lightning flash can smite you there; that cross will conduct the lightning of divine wrath right away from you, and you will be saved; and you will say afterwards, "I am glad that I stayed to the communion, and that I communed, for I did not merely eat bread and drink wine, I spiritually ate the flesh and drank the blood of my Lord, and I had fellowship with him, and he hath made me strong to suffer or to serve." If it be so with us now, or if it hath been so in the past, let us sing unto the Lord a glad song of thanksgiving for this trinity of blessing,—life, favour, and preserving visitation; yea, let us sing unto him as long as we live.

II. Very briefly must I speak upon the second part of our subject, that is, A SOLACE FOR DARK NIGHTS: "And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee."

There is another interpretation of this verse, quite different from the one that I am going to give you, but I do not think that Job ever could have meant what some people think he did. I believe that, when he said, "These things"—that is, life, favour, and God's gracious visitation,—"These things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee," that he meant, first, that *God remembers what he has done, and will not lose his pains.* "'Thou hast granted

me life and favour; ' Lord, thou hast not forgotten that; thou hast hidden that in thine heart, thou rememberest it well. Since thou hast done this for me, and thou dost remember that thou hast done it, therefore thou wilt continue thy mercy to me, and not lose all the grace and goodness which thou hast already bestowed upon me." Just think of that for a minute. Even if you have forgotten all that God has done for you, God has not forgotten it. If you do a kindness to a man, it is very probable that he will not recollect it, but you will. Many children forget all the kindness and love of their mother, but the mother remembers all that she did for her children in the days of their helplessness, and she loves them all the more because of what she did for them. There is a little secret which I may whisper in your ear. If you want people to love you, do what you can for them; yet, possibly, you will not gain their love by that process; but if you let them do something for you, they will be sure to love you then. When you have done much for anyone, you are specially bound to that person, so Job puts it thus, "Thou, Lord, hast done much for me, thou hast all this in thy remembrance; and I am persuaded that this binds thee to me,—thy great goodness in giving me life, and favour, and in visiting me,—all this hath bound thee to me, and I feel persuaded that thou wilt not leave me." That is the teaching of the verse many of us delight to sing,—

> "His love in time past forbids me to think
> He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
> Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
> Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through."

If the Lord had not meant to finish his work, he would never have begun it; if he had not meant to bring us to heaven, he would not have snatched us like brands from the burning; if he had not meant to complete his work, he would not have spent so much upon us. "Spent so much upon us?" says one. Ay, he lavished upon his people more than all the millionaires who were ever upon the earth have possessed, he expended more than there is in heaven with the exception of that which he spent upon them. "What is that?" you ask. He spent the life of his only-begotten Son; and heaven itself does not contain any other treasure that is at all comparable to the Father's equal Son. He spent the best he had upon us, and do you think that, after that, he will ever leave us? Nay, that can never be; though he were to take away all our property, though he were to deprive us of every one of our children, thou he were to cover us from head to foot with sore blains, though he should cause us to sit upon a dunghill, and scrape ourselves with a potsherd, though the very wife of our bosom should bid us curse God and die, though all our friends should become miserable comforters, and make us ready to curse the day on which we saw the light, yet still God must be gracious to us, and we must trust him; yea, though he should slay us, yet must we trust in him. All the goodness of the past is an infallible guarantee that he will be good to us even to the end, according to that word concerning the Lord

Jesus, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." That is one meaning of the verse.

But, next, I think that the words, "And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee;" have this meaning, that *God sometimes hides his favour and love in his heart, yet they are there still.* At times, it may be that you get no glimpse of his face, or that you see no smile upon it. When that is my experience, I love to turn to that verse in the 63rd Psalm: "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." It is all shadow, shadow, shadow; no sunshine; I cannot see my God, but the very shadow is the shadow of his wings, and as you may often see the chickens cower down beneath the mother hen, and nestle there, so in the shadow of his wings will I rejoice; and you, dear friend, may share that blessed and safe shelter. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." When there is no light, thou shalt walk on as steadily as if seven suns were shining. When there is no comfortable assurance for thee, when there is no temporal deliverance, when there is nothing for thee out of the winepress or out of the barn, when there is no friend nor helper near thee, when the fig tree doth not blossom, when thou hast no flocks, and thy herds are cut off by the storm, when God's mercy seems to be clean gone for ever, and his promises all appear to fail, it is not really so.

> "He hides the purpose of his grace
> To make it better known."

The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; therefore, O tried child of God, learn what Job here teaches us, that these things are still hidden in the heart of God, and that eternal love holdeth fast to the objects of its choice.

"I know that this is with thee," said Job, so the last thing I want you to learn from his words is that *God would have his people strong in faith to know this truth.* Job says, "*I know* that this is with thee." I speak to many persons who say that they are Christians, and who perhaps are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and one of their clearest evidences is that they are very happy. Dear young people, I am glad you are so happy. True religion makes people happy, it is a perennial fountain of delight. But do not set too much store by your emotions of delight, because they may be taken from you, and then where will your evidences be? God's people sometimes walk in darkness, and see no light. There are times when the best and brightest of saints have no joy. I will not say whether they are not to be blamed for that, it is probable that they are in most instances, though I do not see that Job could be much blamed; I wish I was able to be a thousandth part as good as he was with a thousandth part of his pains and troubles. But it is a fact that, whether rightly or wrongly, God's people are not always joyous; as Peter says, "For a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Whenever you get into that condition, dear young people, if you have learned to trust Christ before,

trust him still. If your religion should not, for a time, yield you any joy, cling to it all the same. Do not give it up; for if there is any time when you want faith, it is when your spirits sink, and when your outward trials multiply.

You see, God does not give you faith in order that you may merely run about in the meadows with it all among the fair spring flowers. I will tell you for what purpose he gives you faith; it is that you may put on your snow-shoes, and go out in the cold wintry blast, and glide along over the ice and the snow. He does not give you faith that you may put it on as I remember seeing Napoleon's guard with armour in which I saw my face as well as ever I did in a mirror; the Lord does not give you faith merely that you may go on parade with it, and show yourself; you are to fight with it. There is not a fragment of faith that you have which will not be dinted by the blows of the enemy, and rusted through exposure to the weather. You will have difficulties, mark you, as surely as you have faith. You will have a difficulty in maintaining your faith against the assaults of the adversary, for wherever there is faith in the world, there are trials for it to encounter. Railway men do not build bridges over rivers without an intention of sending engines and trains across them, and God does not give faith without an intention of letting it be tried; and he wants you to know, when he does try you, or permit others to try you, that he still loves you. When he leaves you for a little while in the dark, he loves you just as much as when you were in the light. A little child cries, and says that her mother does not love her because she has put her to bed, and gone downstairs, and left her in the dark. She will always be a baby if the mother stays there with a candle by the hour together till she gets to sleep. The mother wants her child to grow into a woman, and she trains her accordingly. So is it with us. God does often humour our littleness and weakness by doing many kind things to us as we do to poor feeble little children, but he wants us to grow up, and become men and women in Christ Jesus, and to be strong in the Lord. I pray that you, my dear brethren and sisters, may be stalwart Christians of this sort. You see, if our faith is to depend upon our disposition, our joy or our sorrow, it will be ever fluctuating, up and down; and we shall be apt to think that we may be saved to-day and lost to-morrow. That is not the teaching of the Bible. When you are on the mount with Christ, you are safe; but when you are at the bottom of the valley with Christ, you are just as safe; when you sit at the table with Christ, you are safe; and so you are if you should be at sea with Christ in the vessel. Only have faith in him, and say, "My God, thy will towards me to give me life, and favour, and preservation, may be hidden, but it is still in thine heart, 'I know that this is with thee.'"

Now I must leave these things with you. You who know and love the Lord will seek a renewal of his visitations to-night; and as for you who do not know him, oh, how I wish that you did! Often as I come on this platform, and look upon this throng of people, I should wonder why so many came if I did not know that the earnest

simple preaching of the gospel will never fail to bring people together. But as you have come to hear the gospel, I pray you also to receive it. Do not merely hear it, but accept it. If there were diamonds to be given away here, and I said that I could give them to everybody who was willing to have them, I am sure that you would not be content to hear me talking about their beauty, their facets, or their particular brilliance, but you would each one cry out, "Hand me one," "Give me one," "Pass me down one worth a hundred thousand pounds; I will be content with that, and you may leave off talking if you like." I will leave off talking about Christ if you will take him as your Saviour. I shall not need to extol him when you have once accepted him, for you will find out his excellence for yourselves. The Scripture saith, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Oh, that you would all taste and see for yourselves! You would know his goodness far better from that taste and sight than you can ever know it from any human language however earnest it may be. God bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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THE BOOK FUND AND ITS WORK,

1898 AND 1899.

BY MRS. C. H. SPURGEON.

For several years, Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon's Book Fund Reports have not been on sale; they have only been sent to subscribers. So many enquiries have, however, been made for the Reports by other friends, that extra copies have been printed this time, and they can be obtained of the publishers, Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, or through all booksellers and colporteurs.

It has been a source of surprise to many people that any Report of the Book Fund could be issued while Mrs. Spurgeon continues so very ill. The explanation is that, before she was laid aside, the Lord had graciously enabled her almost to complete the manuscript; and when she felt that the time for its publication had arrived, little labour was required beyond the compilation of the various tables of statistics and lists of contributions,—a task of which others were able almost entirely to relieve her.

The Report—which was at first delayed because of the more pressing claims of the *Autobiography*, and afterwards by Mrs. Spurgeon's long and serious illness,—now covers the work of two years; and a very remarkable work it is. Over 10,000 volumes and more than 126,000 of Mr. Spurgeon's Sermons have been sent out during that period, while all the other departments of Book Fund, Pastors' Aid Fund, and Auxiliary Book Fund service have continued in active operation. Mrs. Spurgeon again pleads the cause of her poor pastors with all the earnestness and pathos of former years, and she gives extracts from many of the grateful letters written by the recipients of her grants, special prominence being accorded to the epistles she has received from clergymen who have derived benefit from her dear husband's writings. The Report makes a neat booklet of 84 pages, and we think many of our readers will thank us for calling attention to its publication; possibly, some of them, after examining it, will become subscribers to the Book Fund, and so help to extend its beneficent influence.—*Review in July "Sword and Trowel."*

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BITTERNESS OF THE CROSS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 15TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, May 12th, 1881.

"They . . . . shall be in bitterness for him."—Zechariah xii. 10.

You know, dear friends, that this text primarily refers to the Jewish nation. They will not always be blinded, as they are at present. The veil will ultimately be taken away from their eyes and their heart; and when it is taken away, it will not be by the enlightenment of mere reason, or through the cogency of argument by itself, but it will be through the outpouring of the Spirit of our God. The verse from which our text is taken makes this quite clear: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications."

Our Lord Jesus Christ can only be seen in his own light. The grace of God must be given to us before we can see and understand Christ at all; and this shall be the great proof that grace has been given to Israel,—that they shall look upon Christ. It is good evidence that grace has been given to any man when he looks upon Christ, obeying the great command: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." This is the first sign and token of believers, and it is to be our continual distinguishing mark, for we are always to be "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." There is much more in a look at Christ than many suppose; it is the index of everything that appertains to the Christian life. There must be life in an eye that can see; and when there is life in the eye, there is life in the whole man who possesses that eye. When an eye can see Christ, it can see other things that he intends it to see. That eye which has been enabled to behold him, and which has taught the heart to cry, "My Lord and my God," is prepared to see all the wondrous things that are in God's law.

The first mark of grace, then, in the Jew, will be that he shall look to Christ. By that word "look", I do not understand a mere transient glance at him, but a long, lingering, wistful, discerning, penetrating, loving look at him, and unto him, as it is in that verse,

"They looked unto him, and were lightened." At first, it may be only a furtive stolen glance; but when men come to see and feel the full power of Christ, they will want to have a long, fixed, steady gaze at him. Blessed will be the day when the Jews shall be brought even to think seriously about Christ. At present, they will scarcely listen to the arguments concerning him; they denounce the Nazarene, and stop their ears against his gospel; but the day shall come when they will hear, when they will hearken diligently, and incline their ear, and come unto him that their soul may live. They shall look, and look, and look, and look, and look, until the vision shall at last break in upon their very soul, and then they shall say, "It is he! Yes, it is he of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. This is no other than the promised Messiah, the Son of David; and, alas! hitherto, both we and our fathers have rejected him." And as they thus look, and realize the greatness of their guilt, they will begin to weep and lament that they have so long refused their only Saviour.

So, the first effect upon the Jews of a true sight of Christ—and, as we are all constituted so much alike, the first effect upon any man who has a true sight of Christ,—is that it produces sincere sorrow: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." I must confess that I have no love for a dry-eyed faith. The faith that never wept over sin will have to be wept over one of these days. If thou sayest that thou hast seen Christ, and yet thou hast never bemoaned thyself, and mourned over thy transgressions, methinks thou must have seen a false christ, and not the true Son of God; for they who behold his wounds are themselves wounded, they who gaze upon his pierced heart are themselves pierced to the heart,—nay, they are pierced in the heart, and they who, by faith, see the flowing of his precious blood feel their very hearts bleed on account of him, and all that he endured on their behalf. A sight of his crucifixion crucifies sin. A sight of his death—if it be a true sight,—is the death of all love of sin. If, then, thou hast never felt the mournful effect of the sorrowful spectacle of the bleeding Saviour, thou hast need still to stand, and to look, and look, and look again until thou dost feel it, for so it will always be: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn."

That is the general thought of this verse, the Jews will look to Christ, and they will mourn; and the same thing happens with Gentiles, they also look to Christ, and they mourn. So the theme we are to consider is the wonderful truth that, when we rightly look to Christ, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we are "in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." It is quite true that, of all sights in the world, the sight of Christ crucified is the sweetest. People say, "See Naples, and die;" but it would be worth while to see Christ by faith, even if that sight were necessarily followed by death. Of all that can be seen in the world, there is nothing so delightful as a believing sight of Jesus Christ.

I appeal to all of you whose eyes have ever been ravished with that wondrous vision; do you not say to your Lord,—

> "A glimpse—a single glimpse of thee,
> Would more delight my soul
> Than this vain world, with all its joys,
> Could I possess the whole"?

At first sight, it seems strange that the mourner turns his eyes sooner to the place called Calvary than to the sacred spot where the star of Bethlehem shone; and stranger still that there should be more delight to be found in Gabbatha and Golgotha than even in the Mount of Transfiguration. The cross of Christ is the first resort of sorrow for sin, and it is the last abode of holy grief, where she lays aside her weeds, and puts on her beautiful array. Yet there must be some bitterness always associated with Calvary; do not be startled at that thought. The command concerning the paschal lamb was, "With bitter herbs shall ye eat it;" so marvel not that the Lamb of God, however sweet he is, and however nourishing to our souls, can never be enjoyed by us without the bitter herbs of godly sorrow for sin: "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him;" and that bitterness shall be of the most intense kind: "as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

Our line of thought will be this. First, I want to point out to you that *our first sight of Christ brings bitterness;* then, secondly, I will try to show you that *our continued sight of Christ works in us throughout life a measure of the same bitterness;* and, thirdly, I will ask you to notice that *this bitterness has most gracious effects upon us.*

I. First, then, I want to point out to you that OUR FIRST SIGHT OF CHRIST BRINGS BITTERNESS INTO OUR SOUL.

When a man, for the first time, by faith sees Christ upon the cross, and understands the meaning of his great substitutionary sacrifice, *he is bitterly grieved because he has not known him before.* Imagine the case of a Jew who has, perhaps, lived in a nominally Christian country for fifty years. He has frequently heard the name of Jesus mentioned in various ways, but he has always received it with indignation, possibly even with ridicule. It is quite likely that he has spoken very bitter things against the Nazarene, repeating the old stories current among his race concerning the Prophet of Nazareth, and all the while thinking that he was doing service to Jehovah by rejecting one whom he supposed to be a pretender. Imagine that man, all of a sudden, convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God, the only Saviour of sinners, the promised hope of Israel's seed. Why, methinks, if there were not many sweet and precious thoughts to be mingled with the bitter ones, he would be almost driven to utter despair. Surely he would, with humble penitence and many tears, fall down at that dear Saviour's feet, and cry, "Forgive me, Lord, every opprobrious epithet that I have ever uttered; pardon me for every scornful word that I have spoken; forget every hard and

cruel speech that I have made against thee, O thou bleeding Lamb of God, whose blood taketh away the sin of the world!"

I beseech some of you, who are not Jews, but sinners of the Gentiles, to recollect that your position is no better than theirs, and in some respects it is even worse. I know mine was, because I knew Jesus to be the Messiah. I never had a doubt about that, and yet I did not believe in him. I acknowledged him to be the Son of God. From my childhood I was taught that great truth, and I accepted it as a fact, yet I did not obey him as my Lord and my God. I knew him to be the only Saviour of sinners, and if anyone had spoken contrary to that truth in my presence, my indignation would have burned against him; yet, all the while, so far as my own consciousness was concerned, he was no Saviour to me. I knew that he hung upon the cross that he might save the guilty, but I did not, for a long time, realize that I had a personal interest in his saving grace. From my own experience, I am sure that the bitterness of anyone who has sinned in that way, when at last he understands the great plan of salvation, and finds that Christ loved him, and gave himself to death for him, must be quite as great as the bitterness of the Jews who make the same discovery. For, lo, my brethren, they did it ignorantly in unbelief, but you and I have done it wantonly, or at least carelessly, and indifferently, knowing that we were rejecting our mother's Saviour and our father's Christ. Herein is much of bitterness that you ought to feel, and when you do get a true view of Jesus as your Substitute and Saviour, you will feel it very acutely, and you will say to yourself, "Oh, that I had known him before! Oh, that I had loved him before! Oh, that I had trusted him before! Alas! that all these years should have been wasted, and that I should have chosen sin rather than the Saviour, and the pleasures of the world sooner than the delights of his dear love." I know that you will have bitterness about that matter when you really come to Christ for salvation.

Next, there will come over your soul, when you get a true sight of Christ, much bitterness *on account of your having slighted the extraordinary love of Christ to you.* This truth will come home to your heart, with wonderful power, "He loved me, and gave himself for me. For me he wore that crown of thorns, for me he endured that terrible scourging, for me he bore the piercing of those nails, for me he agonized unto that bloody sweat, for me he suffered even unto death." And then you will say, "And yet I have been all this while slighting him! Others have loved me, and I have returned their love, ashamed to be thought ungrateful; but all of them put together have never loved me as he has done, yet I have been his enemy, and, as far as I could, I have opposed him. He has stood outside my door, and knocked, and I have kept him waiting there till his head has been filled with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night. Woe is me! Woe is me, that I should have treated so ill my best Friend!" It is long, dear brothers and sisters, since my heart ceased to shut him out. I admitted him long ago; but even while I am talking to you about it, I feel all the old bitterness of that sad past coming over me. I could stand here and weep to

think that, though I loved him comparatively early in life, I did not love him earlier, and did not sooner yield to his persistent knocking, and to the gracious pressure of his infinite love.

Another bitterness, which ought soon to be banished, steals over the heart; it is this, *the fear lest Christ should not be ours after all.* I have known some, who have understood the doctrine of the cross right well, and have believed in the great love of Jesus Christ for sinners; but then there has come over their mind and heart that dark doubting thought, "Will his blood be available for us? Will he ever be ours? After years of rejecting him, shall we ever find him, or have we for ever missed him? Is our day of grace past, or does he still wait to be gracious? Will he still accept us, or has he gone away, saying, 'I will give them up; they are joined unto idols, so I will let them alone'?" Oh, the bitterness of such a question as that! To see living water, clear as crystal, leaping up close by you, and yet to fear that you may not drink of it! To see the bread of life placed upon the table, and yet to doubt whether your unworthy lips may ever taste of that heavenly food! That is bitterness indeed; but let it be a bitterness that goes away at once and for ever, for there is no question about that matter. If thou wilt believe in Jesus, that is proof positive that God wills it. The question is never about God's will, when once thy will is surrendered to Christ. If thou art willing to accept Christ, it is because it is the day of God's power, and he has made thee willing. If thou wilt have Christ, he presents himself to thee with this gracious word, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." So let that bitter thought be nailed up to the cross, and die for ever.

Then there follows, over and above all this, the black, bitter thought that *our sin caused his death on the tree.* The awakened soul sighs, "My sins! My sins! My sins!" Nothing ever reveals sin like the cross of Christ. Milton pictures Ithuriel with his spear touching the toad that lay squatting at Eve's ear, and suddenly it arose in the form of the dark fiend of hell. So does the cross touch what we thought to be only mistakes and errors, and they rise before us in their true character as hellish sins. In the light of Calvary, sin doth like itself appear; and what is the likeness of sin there? Why, the murderer of the Son of God,—the murderer of the Prince of Life,—the murderer of man's best Friend, whose only crime was this,—"found guilty of excess of love," and therefore he must die. O sin, is this what thou art? Art thou a God-killing thing? I have heard of men being guilty of regicide; but what shall I say concerning Deicide? Yet sin virtually, and as much as it can, stabs at the Godhead, crying, with the wicked husbandmen, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." This is the terrible character of sin,—it will imbrue its hands in the blood of him who is perfectly innocent and perfectly benevolent, it will take man's best Friend by the throat, condemn him as if he were a felon, nail him to a gibbet, and then stand and gaze at him, and mock his very death-throes. There is nothing upon earth that is so devilish as sin. Oh, to what extremes of atrocity has sin not gone! And such is your sin and mine, to a greater or less degree.

A sight of the cross, therefore, brings bitterness into the soul, because it shows us what sin is, and what are its ultimate issues and true designs if it could carry them out. Never do we smite upon our breast so hard as when we see the cross of Jesus. We are condemned at the mercy-seat even more fully than we are at the judgment-seat. This is the condemnation of sin in the soul of man, that he sees what it did in murdering the Christ of God, and this causes the repenting sinner to "be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

To this is added another source of bitterness, namely, *the discovery of the wrath of God on account of sin.* You stand in imagination, and look at Jesus Christ dying upon the cross, and you say to yourself, "The Romans are here, and the Jews are here, and all men are here, representatively; but there is Someone greater than all these here." Then there comes to you from the ancient prophecy this message, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." Yes, God himself put Christ into the sinner's place through wondrous love to us, and as Christ stood in the sinner's place, though a sinner he could never be, God treated him as if he were actually the sinner. See how the Father's wrath burns against human sin; he could not be angry with his well-beloved Son; but, inasmuch as Christ stood in the sinner's place, God poured out the vials of his wrath upon him just as if he had been guilty. Behold how the Father smites him; these are his words, "Awake, O sword." Will not the rod suffice, great God? No. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts. Smite the shepherd." But will not some common smiting be sufficient? No; to the very heart he must be smitten, and Jesus must die the death of the cross that we may live for ever. "How God must hate sin, then, and what wrath must fall upon me!" That is the convicted sinner's thought. "My sin is personal and actual, and not, like Christ's, imputed; and since it is my own, how can God continue to bear with me?" And the dark suggestion comes into the soul, "He will not bear with you much longer, for it is written, 'I will ease me of mine adversaries.'" Yes, verily, a true sight of the cross makes us full of bitterness on account of the awful guilt of sin, and the divine wrath which it provokes.

And then comes the bitterness of *the dread of never being forgiven.* The convinced sinner says, "God spared not his only-begotten Son when sin was laid upon him; then, surely, he will not spare me. I am full of guilt, and I have within me a fountain of evil which is perpetually bubbling up with foulness,—how can the pure and holy God spare me? Whither can I flee to get away from his presence? How can I escape from the bolts of his righteous wrath? Let me fly whither I may, he will pursue me, and overtake me, and destroy me." Do any of you know what it is to feel like this? I remember when I did; I was in such terror that I feared lest every step I took should be my last, and that I should stumble

first into my grave and then into hell. "Did the cross make you feel like that?" you ask. Yes, certainly; for I could not but think that, though Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I should never have to ask that question, because I should know why God had forsaken me, for my sin was sufficient to drive him away from me for ever.

I feel quite sure that God intends our first sight of Christ to fill our soul with bitterness; and therefore I ask you most seriously to question your conversion unless there was some measure of this bitterness mingled with it. A sinner's sight of Christ must breed sorrow for sin; it is unavoidable; and the more clear that sight shall become, and the more it is mixed with faith, and the more sure we are of pardon, the more bitterness will there be in it. When we know that our sins are forgiven, it is then that we most of all realize their guilt, and abhor and hate them. That hymn which we sometimes sing exactly sets forth this truth,—

"My sins, my sins, my Saviour,
How sad on thee they fall!
Seen through thy gentle patience,
I tenfold feel them all.

"I know they are forgiven,
But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish
They laid, my Lord, on thee.

"My sins, my sins, my Saviour!
Their guilt I never knew
Till, with thee, in the desert
I near thy passion drew;

"Till with thee in the garden
I heard thy pleading prayer,
And saw the sweat-drops bloody
That told thy sorrow there."

II. Now, secondly, OUR CONTINUED SIGHT OF CHRIST WORKS IN US THROUGHOUT LIFE A MEASURE OF THE SAME BITTERNESS.

For, first, *as the great love of Christ is better known, it brings deeper grief for sin.* We then more deeply lament that we should ever have slighted such love, and that such love should ever have been called to so vast a sacrifice as that which it made for us. I do not suppose, beloved, that your knowledge of the love of Christ at first was at all comparable to what it is now; if you have studied in the school of Christ's love, and have believed it to be the most excellent of all the sciences, you will, by the teaching of the Spirit, and by experience, attain a clearer knowledge of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and side by side with that will be a growing sense of abhorrence of yourself, and detestation of the sin which nailed your Saviour to the tree. It must be so; deeper love to Christ will breed greater grief and a yet more bitter bitterness on account of sin.

There will also be, in your heart, an intenser bitterness arising

from *the dread of grieving your Lord.* Oh, have you not sometimes wished that you could die rather than run any risk of apostacy? I marvel not at the poor Methodist who, when surrounded by blasphemers, who seemed as if they would drive him from Christ, fell on his knees, and prayed the Lord to take him home to heaven, so that he might never again be tempted to go astray. Bitterer than death itself would it be for us ever to dishonour that dear name by which we are called. Feel you not so, my brother, my sister? I believe that, the higher your joy in Christ, the greater will be your fear lest you should bring disgrace upon him. You stand almost on the top of the mountain of communion, you seem to be transfigured with your Master, and to be glowing with the light that streams from him; yet even there the thought comes to you, "What if, after all this, I should slip with my feet? Peter, who was one of the three with the Lord on the holy mount, himself afterwards denied his Master with oaths and curses; then, may not I also be found wanting in the time of trial?" This self-examination is almost needful to the mellowing of our holy joy. As the sycamore fig never ripens till it is bruised, so there is a high joy of fellowship that needs bruising, by a sense of our own weakness, ere its essential sweetness shall be fully developed. I have a great fear concerning your condition if you never felt anything of this bitterness,—this dread lest, in thought, or word, or deed, by omission or by commission, you should grieve the sweet and tender love of Christ. You know how the spouse said, "I charge you, ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field," —by all that is most gentle, and timid, and delicate, and jealous, and full of love,—"that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please." It is thus that the holy soul feels the bitterness of an inward jealousy lest she should be treacherous to her Lord, or that anything should occur to grieve him.

The next bitterness is caused by *a deeper regret on account of our own unworthiness.* I think that those who love Christ much, and who have had a clear view of his love, never can be satisfied with themselves. Do you ever rise from your knees, and say, "I am quite content with that prayer"? If so, I fancy that you cannot have prayed "with groanings which cannot be uttered." Did you ever preach a sermon, brother, and feel, after it was finished, that you could run up the top-gallants, and cry, "Never man preached as I have done"? If so, I am afraid that it was very poor preaching, with many fine feathers in its tail to spread out like a peacock's, but with few feathers in its wings to make it mount up like an eagle. It will never do for us to be satisfied with ourselves, for vehement love thinks nothing good enough for Christ. When it reaches its best, it says, "My best is utter poverty compared with his deserts." "Oh!" says the saint who truly loves his Lord, "I am ashamed to bring him even my best offerings; and when, sometimes, I lie at his feet, and feel that I am perfectly consecrated, I still wish that there was something better to consecrate, and that I could keep up that complete consecration at all times and seasons, and under all circumstances." But since it is not so with any one

of us, there is a bitterness that mingles with the very sight of Christ. You may look at yourself until you get quite pleased with yourself, but you cannot remain so when once you look at him. You know how Job spoke to the Lord, when he took his right position before him, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Those brethren who think themselves perfect had better come and look at their Lord; and then, if their comeliness is not turned to corruption, I shall be greatly mistaken. A glimpse at him would act like flames of fire turning dry stubble into ashes;, for, in a moment, all their glory would be utterly consumed.

Then, again, I am sure there is another bitterness that will always accompany a true sight of Christ, and that is, *an intense horror at man's rejection of him.* Have not you, beloved, sometimes looked at your Lord, and loved and adored him, till, first, you have pitied men, and afterwards you have pitied Christ? With those who love Christ most, there comes to be, after a time, sympathy with Jesus rather than with men. I can understand how, even when the enemies of God shall be destroyed at the last, and the smoke of their torment shall rise up for ever and ever, the perfect ones in heaven will sing, "Hallelujah." Certain persons, who are on earth at the present time, if they had been at the Red Sea, and seen old Pharaoh's army cast into the depths, would have mournfully said, "This is very, very grievous to us." But as for me, if I had been there, I would have joined with Moses and with Miriam, and said, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." I confess that I have very small sympathy with Pharaoh, but I have the most intense sympathy with Jehovah and with his people; and I question whether the wonderful sympathy with lost sinners, which some people profess to feel, is not sympathy with their sin as much as with themselves, perhaps unconsciously to those who indulge it.

If we were perfectly holy, we should desire to do just what God does, and we should wish God to do exactly what he is doing, and we should rejoice without question in all the will of God. One result of such a state of mind as that would be that we should cry with the psalmist, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." I do not know that I ever felt a greater horror in my soul than when, in Rôme, I stood at the foot of the Santa Scala,—"the holy staircase," as they call it,—on which they pretend to show the marks where our Saviour fainted on the stairs in Jerusalem. I saw poor deluded creatures go up and down those stairs upon their knees, repeating certain forms of prayer all the while. Ah, me! it did seem horrible; and, worst of all, the priests have turned the Christ himself into an idol. There is a little black picture of him, at the top of the stairs, which is reputed to have been painted by Luke, and it is kissed and worshipped, and thus even our blessed Master is made to act the lackey to idolatry. I thought that, if I could have borrowed a thunderbolt or two for a little while, I could have made a clean sweep here and there in

Rome; but the time for that is not yet. That time will come, and a very clean sweep there will be when the cry is heard, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . . . And her smoke rose up for ever and ever."

But, brethren, there is an intense bitterness in your heart when you come truly to see Christ on the cross, as you realize that all people do not believe in him, that his kingdom has not yet come, and that his will is not done on earth as it is in heaven. Still do men reject him; they scoff at his gospel, they despise his cause, they set up idol gods and false saviours; and all this is as a dish of bitter herbs to those who really love him. It seems passing strange that he should ever have entered into this awful battle between good and evil, that he should have come, the foremost and noblest of champions, baring his arm for the war, and that in the fight he should not only have sweat as it were great drops of blood, but that he should have had his heart broken in the fray. Ah, me! how sad it is that he, whom angels worship, and in whom God himself delights, should be trampled, by the feet of wicked men, like mire in the streets; that they should dare to defile with their spittle that face which outshines the sun, and pour contempt and scorn upon him who fills eternity with the splendours of the Deity! All this is like bitter herbs to those who love him. Still, the final victory will be won by him, and it will be worth all that it costs. Up the everlasting hills he has already ascended, victor from the fight; and to-day he divides the spoil with the strong. But, oh, that it had been possible for that bitter cup to have passed from him! Oh, that it had been possible that he should not drink the hell-draught! Yet he did drink it to the last dregs; it is all over now, glory be to his holy name! But the taste of the bitter herbs is always present with the true Paschal Lamb to those who spiritually feed thereon by faith.

III. Now I must close by noticing that THIS BITTERNESS HAS MOST GRACIOUS EFFECTS UPON US.

First, it must be evident to you all that *this bitterness works great hatred of sin*. We see how cruel sin has been to Christ, and we therefore seek to avoid it. The burnt child dreads the fire; but we are not quite in that condition. We dread the fire of sin because it burned the Saviour; that is why we hate it so intensely. Sin murdered him; so, can we ever tolerate it? Could anyone ever play with the knife that had killed his best friend? Could he preserve it as a choice treasure? Nay, he would, if he could, fling it into the depths of oblivion; and sin, thou cruel murderous thing that slew our Saviour, we would take revenge upon thee! We abhor thee; God has made thee bitter to us; and there dwells, in that bitterness, a power that helps to sanctify us.

But, next, *that bitterness makes Christ very sweet*. "Why!" you ask, "how is that?" Well, I suppose that the bitter herbs made the paschal lamb taste all the sweeter to the Israelite of old; and I am sure that a bitter sense of sin, and bitter regrets that we should ever have cost our Saviour so much, and a bitter sense of our own unworthiness, all make Christ more precious to us. It is like the two

balances in a pair of scales; when you go up, Christ goes down; and when you go down, down, down, down, to nothing, and far below zero, then Christ goes up. No man can know the sweetness of Christ who has not tasted the bitterness of sin.

Next, *it makes all worldly things lose their taste.* If you get some of the bitterness that comes of mourning about Christ, the sweetest things of the world will have but very little attraction for you. I will give you an illustration of this truth. Suppose you had an only son, and that you lost him; would not everything look dark about you then? It comes home to a man's heart very heavily when such a treasure is taken away from him. He has a farm, but he has no joy in it; the old home seems to be a very dreary place to him now; he wishes to move away from it, and to forget all it contained. That is the kind of bitterness of which our text speaks: "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." And thus the world loses its charms for true believers, as Paul says, "It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not," because a stronger flavour has taken possession of their palate, and made them forget everything else. Thus, the bitterness of mourning for Christ takes away the power to enjoy the sweets of this world.

But there is something better than that, for *it removes the bitterness from the things of this life.* Suppose you suffer great pain. I was yesterday by the side of a dear sister in Christ who has undergone terrible pain, and she said to me, "Thoughts of the Lord Jesus, and of his sufferings, were so sweet to me that I seemed only to recollect my own griefs as they helped me to remember his." That is how it should be with each of us; as we are called to suffer, we should say,—

> "His way was much rougher and darker than mine;
> Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?"

How often the bitterness of poverty has vanished when men have thought of him who had not where to lay his head! How frequently the bitterness of persecution has departed when his followers have remembered that he was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief! One brings us what he says is a bitter draught, and we say, "Do you call that bitter? I have tasted something much more bitter than that; I can drink it, and even rejoice in it, since I have been taught how to take the very gall of bitterness, that which has the intensity of the bitterest Peruvian bark, even sympathy with my Saviour in his awful sufferings."

And let me also tell you, dear brethren, that one effect of this bitterness upon the soul that feels it is, *to take away all bitterness against your fellow-men.* If you have really felt the bitterness of your sin against Christ, you have said to yourself, "Well, now, after this, I must be sweet, and gentle, and kind, and tender, and forgiving towards others. Somebody has offended me. Ah, but then

how much I offended God! He will not ask my forgiveness, he says. Yes, but my Lord prayed for those who put him to death, and said, 'Father, forgive them,' though they sought not forgiveness; must not I do the same?" I am sure that, if you mourn on account of your own sin, you will be the last person in the world to be harsh and severe in your judgment upon others. You will say, "I cannot take up the stone to cast at them, even if others do so." The poor harlot comes before the Saviour, and the self-righteous Pharisees will accuse her; but no one of us, I think, will do so, for who among us has not been guilty; and if we have been pardoned, how can we condemn others? I charge any of you, who harbour ill-will against others, to remember that you cannot be Christians if you carry that foul serpent in your bosom. You can bring no acceptable sacrifices to God's altar while you are at enmity against your brother. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Whatever else you may or may not do, this you must do, forgive as you would be forgiven; and let the bitterness of your sympathy with Christ take away from your nature all bitterness, and harshness, and unkindness, and malice, towards your fellow-men.

Last of all, *in this bitterness with Christ, there is an unutterable sweetness.* If I were asked when I have felt most happy, if the question were put to me in the most unlimited sense,—"When did you feel such happiness as you could wish always to feel?"—I should not quote any of the days of earth's mirth, for, as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the best of mortal merriment. I could not even quote the day in which I first knew the Lord, because, though there was an intensity of delight about it, it was not so deep as the joy I am going to mention. Neither, if I had to ask for a joy that might continue with me, should I ask to have the high delights which I have often experienced when in sweetest fellowship with my Lord, for that kind of joy is killing, we cannot endure much of it. But I think that the sweetest joy I ever felt was when, racked with pain, and broken all asunder, I fell back upon the omnipotent love of God, like a child who cannot walk, or move, or even stand, but just lies on its mother's breast, quite passive, quite at peace.

I think that mourning for sin is as sweet a flower as blooms outside heaven. I suppose that pearl of flowers blooms not on the other side of Jordan. It is the only flower on earth that I would like to carry there, just as Rowland Hill used to say that repentance and he had kept such sweet company that the only regret he had about heaven was that he supposed he should not repent there. Well, all that is good, we shall have there; "and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." But I do assure you, from my own experience, that the still, calm, quiet joy which does not well up out of yourself, but comes into you direct from Christ by the way of the cross,—that dew which falls not on Hermon, but on Calvary,—is the rarest and most roseate dew that ever charms us this side of the glory-land. God give you all to know, to the full extent, the sweet bitterness—the bitter sweetness—that comes of a sight of Christ crucified, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TWO ARGUMENTS AGAINST SIN.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 22ND, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, May 29th, 1881.

"Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."—Jeremiah xliv. 4.

THIS verse pourtrays what a minister should be, and the picture is a burden upon my heart and conscience, for it shows that the true preacher, or prophet, or man of God, should be one whom God sends early to do his work. It is, as it were, as though his Master were up early in the morning, bidding him make haste to go to his service, and not let the grass grow under his feet, for men are sinning; and to suffer them to continue in sin unrebuked even for an hour, is truly dreadful. It is as though one were to leave a house burning without giving an alarm, and calling the firemen, or to see a person in imminent peril in the street without immediately attempting to do something for his rescue. Notice that, in this verse, God represents himself as rising early, to show how he realized the greatness of man's danger, and the importance of his being speedily delivered from it. The Lord said that he rose early in order that he might send his prophets;—of course, that they might go early, that they might go at once, and waste no time, but be instant in season and out of season to warn men not to do the abominable thing which God hated. A minister, then, is one who should be diligent in his Master's business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord by endeavouring to warn men of the terrible nature and consequences of sin.

He is also to be one who speaks as God's representative; not only speaking God's truth, but, as it were, speaking it with God's mouth, for these prophets were not to say, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that God hates," but they were to personify God, to put themselves into his place, and to say as though he said it, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that *I* hate." What a responsible and privileged position is this for any man to occupy, to have to speak for God in this fashion! Paul referred to it when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though

God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." It is a high honour but a tremendous responsibility to have to do Christ's pleading, to be intercessors for the Intercessor, and to stand up and speak God's thoughts, as though he had set us for a time to be his spokesmen, to plead with the sons of men on his behalf. As I have realized this responsibility, I have sometimes dreaded my office with a dread unutterable, though I would not change it to become ruler of all the empires of earth, or even to be an archangel in heaven, for I reckon that, even to be first among the angels is nothing compared with being an instrument, in the hand of God, of saving the souls of men. Yet how awful and how solemn a thing it is for any man to be called to stand and speak as though God did speak by him, and say, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

There is another lesson to be learned from this picture;—not only that the minister should rise up early to meet an early God, and should speak in God's name, but he is also to speak in God's style; that is, pleadingly and pathetically. I count it an easy thing to proclaim the truth as one might do it from the desk of a class-room, or to be oratorical and to wax eloquent over the great themes we have to make known; but it is quite another matter to plead with men, to be pathetic, and to speak as God does here, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." This is the work, and this is the difficulty which often burdens our spirits. You remember that the disciples said to Christ, on one occasion, "Lord, teach us to pray," for they felt as if the strong desires that burned within his heart might well burn in theirs, and that they had even greater necessities than he had; but when they heard him preach, they felt at once that he outsoared them all. When they saw the tears of pity stream from his eyes, and listened to his lament over the doomed city of Jerusalem, then they realized that he overmatched them, and they felt, if they did not say it, "Never man spake like this man;" and they did not cry, "Lord, teach us to preach as thou dost." They could not hope to rise to that great height, and we feel just as they did. Oh, that these lips could use language borrowed from the lips of the Well-beloved! Oh, that these eyes could run with tears like those that welled up from the great heart of the loving Saviour of sinners! His sermons show us what true preaching is; it should be the highest form of persuading, it should be really, only in a better sense than that in which the term is generally used, special pleading;—a pleading with men, by weighty arguments, that they would leave their sins, and turn to God,—a pleading in which God, the Holy Ghost, exercises his own supreme office, and works upon the minds of the hearers through the utterances of him who speaks to them. As this is what a minister ought to be, may God help us poor creatures to attain to this high standard! You, who are his people, can also help us by your prayers, which we greatly need.

Now, turning from my text as it specially related to the Jews in Jeremiah's day, I want to apply it to you, dear friends, who are still unconverted. In this verse, God tells certain people that he

had risen early, and sent unto them his servants the prophets, one after another, to plead with them on his behalf. Will you, if you can, kindly recollect when your consciences were first touched? Can you remember when that happened? It is highly probable that the sweet tones of your mother's voice were associated with your first religious thoughts; or, perhaps, there was a godly man,—your father,—since passed into the skies, who pleaded with you, his son, in Christ's name. These were your prophets sent from God;—could there be any better messengers from him than a gracious mother or grandmother, or a godly father? Why, some of you were plied with the gospel almost before you knew anything else! Before you had committed any overt act of sin, you heard of Jesu's wondrous grace and dying love; and, since then, you have not been without messengers from heaven, who have brought you loving entreaties and invitations. How have you treated them all? If you are still unconverted, I am sure that you have not dealt with them as they ought to have been received; you have turned a deaf ear to the voice of love and mercy, or else you would not now be without God, without Christ, and without hope. So I come once more, in my Master's name, as his messenger; will you slight me, and reject my message? If you do, I must sorrowfully endure it, and cry, with others of my Master's servants, "Who hath believed our report?" Yet I pray you, do not so; for, though I speak but feebly, no man more sincerely or more heartily desires the good of his hearers than I do; and I ask you who do know the Lord to join me in pleading that God the Holy Spirit will bless the message I am about to deliver in Christ's name.

In our text there are two arguments against sin. What God has to say to unconverted men is here put in a very few words: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." This short sentence contains the two arguments against sin upon which I am going to speak. The first is, *from the nature of sin itself:* "this abominable thing;" and the second is, *from the feeling of God towards sin:* "this abominable thing that I hate."

I. The first argument, in our text, against sin, is DERIVED FROM THE NATURE OF SIN ITSELF: "this abominable thing."

The particular sin, of which the prophet was speaking, was that of idolatry. Those Jewish people would make idol gods in some form or other, and they would bow down before them, and neglect the worship of the one invisible Jehovah; and God calls their idolatry "this abominable thing." It is rightly so called, for *it is abominable ingratitude.* That a man should not worship his Maker, that he should refuse obedience to his Creator, that he should say to him who made the heavens and the earth, and who also made him, and keeps him in being, "I will not worship thee; I refuse to bow down before thee. I choose to adore another god,—Baal, Ashtaroth, Venus, Bacchus, anything but the one true God,—and I will not worship thee, O Jehovah, the Creator of all worlds;" —this, I say again, is shameful ingratitude.

It is also an abominable thing, because *it is so degrading and debasing.* Everybody ought to be able to see that, for a man with

intellect and mind to bow himself down before a carved image, is most degrading. That he should worship that which is made of wood, or stone, or metal, is practically to make himself inferior to the dead thing which he worships. I know of no act in which a man seems to bring himself lower than when he prostrates himself before any material object, and says, "This is my god," or, "This is what I worship." So God truly calls idolatry an "abominable thing;" and it will appear to you all the more so when you recollect the kind of gods that these people's images represented. They did, in effect, say to Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth, the good and gracious God, "We will not worship thee, but we will worship that golden calf, or those images that have eyes but see not, and hands but feel not, and ears but hear not. We would sooner bow down to these dull dead blocks of wood than worship thee." Oh, this is abominable! I know no more appropriate word than that which God has here used: "this abominable thing." An immortal being prostrating himself before a piece of wood! A man, created by Jehovah, bowing down before an image which he has himself made! This is indeed loathsome; it is insulting to God, and provoking him to the last degree.

"We are all agreed about that," say you. I am glad to hear you say so, yet you may be idolaters, for all that. Have you never heard of those concerning whom Paul wrote to the Philippians, "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things"? Did you ever hear of "the self-made man, who worships his creator"? I have heard of him, and seen him, too; and I confess that I have more respect for a man who worships a god shaped out of the filth of the kennels than for the one who worships himself; because, to worship one's own self, seems to me to be the nethermost depth of degradation. For the Israelites to say of the golden calf, "These be thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," was degrading,—horribly so; but for a man to say to himself, practically, if not in so many words, "I am my own god," surely this sinks him lower still. There are some who worship strong drink, and who offer themselves as a sacrifice at its shrine. There are many, who immolate upon the altar of Bacchus, wife, children, home, character, and life itself; and they go down to their dishonoured graves, not burnt in the arms of Moloch, but drowned in their own cups. When you talk of idolaters and abominable things, is there any worse form of idolatry than this? Then look at the various forms of covetousness, which the apostle Paul says, "is idolatry." Think of the guilt of the men who grind the faces of the poor, and perhaps even pinch themselves, so that they may amass the more gold, and have it written concerning them at the last, "He died worth so much;" when he was really utterly worthless. He who worships the little round images of the Queen is as gross an idolater as the man who bows down before Juggernaut or Baal. The sin of idolatry is still abundant everywhere, and it is always, in its nature and essence, a degrading thing to man, and an insult to God; and therefore he continues to say to all idolaters, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

There are many other sins, besides idolatry, which are abominable in the sight of God; and there is one point about them that hampers a preacher very much, that is, he cannot bear witness against them, because even to speak of some sins is to help to spread them. It is dangerous work to handle gunpowder; and, even when we need to move it from the magazine, we feel that we must do it with great fear and trembling. Alas! alas! there are abominable sins that are terribly common in this awfully guilty London,—sins of unchastity that defile the body and pollute the mind. I fancy that I can see God standing by some young man who is about to go into this kind of sin, and I seem to hear him say, "Oh, do not this abominable thing." I think I also hear God crying out to some woman who has turned aside from the paths of purity, and saying to her, "Oh, do not this abominable thing." It may not appear at the time, when the mind is under the spell of the serpent's fascination, to be so abominable as it really is; but, soberly thought of, what a curse it is to this city, and what a curse it is to each individual who is contaminated by it! Young man, keep far away from the house of the strange woman;—yes, I must say it plainly, God would have me say it, for he himself says, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

There are other abominable sins, besides these fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, such as the tempting of others to sin. It is an awful fact that there are some people who seem to set themselves deliberately to instruct others in vice and transgression. They will defile the imagination and the heart of children and of growing young men and women; this is a dreadful thing. If any of you are in the habit of singing low songs, or of talking ill-savoured language, I would have you hear my God say to you through my lips, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate," for it is a horrible evil for you to be spoiling these fair flowers while yet they are in the bud. Then there is the habit of using profane and filthy language, which is so common in this city,—I think, more prevalent than ever it was. It is a most senseless as well as wicked practice; there is no gain in it. George Herbert quaintly and wisely wrote,—

> "Take not his name, who made thy mouth, in vain:
> It gets thee nothing, and hath no excuse.
> Lust and wine plead a pleasure, avarice gain:
> But the cheap swearer, through his open sluice,
> Lets his soul run for nought, as little fearing.
> Were I an Epicure, I could bate swearing."

There are many who sin greatly by slandering others. They lie against their neighbours' characters, and they are never better pleased than when they can, by exaggeration, make some little flaw into a grave fault. God says to all who slander, and lie, and speak not the truth, "Do not this abominable thing that I hate." Then there is hypocrisy, which is always far too rife,—the making of a profession when there is nothing at the back of it,—the pretending to be gracious when there is no grace in the heart, and to be faithful when there is no faith in the soul. O sirs, if you will be lost, I pray

you, do not be lost as hypocrites! If you are determined to perish, choose some other way of perishing than that which Judas took when he joined himself to the apostles, and yet sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. God says to you, with a special emphasis, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

Another aspect of the abominable character of sin will be apparent if I remind you that *there are some persons in whom sin—any sin—is peculiarly abominable.* If you were privileged, as I was, to be born into a Christian family, having had a grandfather and a great grandfather and other ancestors all walking in the ways of God, and having a father and a mother whose first and chief desire was to train you in the fear of God, you know that, for you to do wrong, under such circumstances, is indeed an abominable thing. Poor gutter children, and persons who dwell in the worst dens and slums of London, and who have never been taught as you and I were, cannot sin to the same extent as we can who have so long known better, and who have been trained aright from our earliest days. O you children of godly parents, I pray you look well to your walk, and hear the Lord say to you especially, "Do not this abominable thing that I hate." There are also some persons who are gifted by nature, or by that grace which God sometimes intertwists with nature, with a tender conscience. Some seem, from the very first, to be more callous and hardened than others; but there are some of us who, from our very childhood, recollect how we could not sleep unless we had said our prayers; or, if we had told a lie, we could not rest till we had confessed it; and if we had disobeyed our parents, we were tormented with remorse even though they did not know what we had done. Chastening was not needed to bring us to repentance, for we chastened ourselves. It is a great mercy to have a tender conscience; but to sin against it, is a peculiarly abominable thing. Mind, my young friend, you who are sorely tempted just now, I charge you not to do violence to your conscience. Whatever you do, be sure to keep it tender, for it is one of your best friends; and it will, by God's grace, be the means of guiding you to heaven. Do not trifle with its warnings; do not sear it with the hot iron of even an occasional transgression; but, at once, obey the Saviour's call, and trust to him for the salvation only he can give. It is an abominable thing for any man to sin; but it is a hundred times worse in some than it is in others, because they have clearer light and a plainer perception of what sin really is.

And, sometimes, sin becomes a specially abominable thing to a man who has previously committed it, and smarted from it, and who has escaped as by the skin of his teeth, and yet goes back to indulge in it again. Have you never tried to save a poor moth, on a summer's evening, when you have been sitting at work or reading by the light of the gas or a candle? It comes dashing towards the light, and singes its wings, and there it lies on the table helpless. You have taken it up very tenderly, and put it away from the light in the hope that it might, perhaps, escape; but the very first thing it has done, when it has recovered even the partial use of its wings has been to fly back into the flame again. You have said, "Ther-

is no saving thee, poor silly thing, for thou art determined to die by thine own folly; thou wilt not let me rescue thee." And it is just so with some sinners whom we try to rescue; they will go back to the very thing that has burnt them already.

Perhaps I am addressing one who, but a little while ago, was on a bed of sickness, and as you were lying there looking into eternity, you cried, "Lord, save me. If thou wilt but spare me, I will turn from sin, and I will seek the Saviour until I find him." Yet you are not doing anything of the kind, though the Lord did spare you. Peter's solemn words might be repeated to you, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they sinned thus. I pray God not to visit you in judgment; but, in his great mercy, to lay all your sin as a heavy burden upon your conscience, that you may feel the evil of having broken your vows and your promises, for this is indeed an abominable thing in the sight of God, and also an abominable thing in the judgment of all honest, right-thinking men.

Thus might I continue to point out various circumstances which increase the guilt of sinners, but I will only say one more thing, and then I shall have finished the consideration of this first part of our subject. The observation I wish to make is this. There are some of us, to whom sin has become such an abominable thing, that we can honestly say we would sooner suffer every pain of which the body is capable than we would wilfully commit sin. There are various things in this world which are loathsome to all our tastes, but we would be willing to have them all around us, however distasteful they might be, rather than be in the presence of moral evil. It grates upon our ear, it galls our mind, it frets our heart, it aggravates all our spiritual senses to be brought into contact with sin. Sin is to us more horrible than death, more diabolical than the devil, more hellish than hell itself, for the pains of hell would lose their sharpness if it were not that sin is the undying worm that causes them. Sin, transgression, iniquity, evil in all its forms, untruth, every violation of God's law,—all this is an abominable thing, which every right-minded man is bound to hate, to loathe, to detest with all the energy of his being. One great reason why we implore men to forsake sin, and pray the Holy Spirit to enable them to do so, is because it is an abominable thing.

"Oh!" says someone, "sin is a sweet thing." No, no; it is an abominable thing. "It is a delightful thing," says another. No, it is an abominable thing. "Oh, but it is a fashionable thing; you can see it in courts of kings, and princes, and the great men of the earth love it." Even though they do, it is an abominable thing. Though it should crawl up to a monarch's throne, and spread its slime over crown jewels, it would still be an abominable thing. It once entered heaven itself, and befouled and defiled a mighty angel and all who followed him; and you can see what an abominable thing it is when you realize how it degraded them, and cast them down from their high estate, to be "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

II. Now, for a little while, I will speak to you upon the second

reason why sin should be repented of and forsaken. That is, because of THE FEELING WHICH GOD HAS TOWARDS IT. Note how strongly he puts it: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

God hates all evil, all injustice, all wrong-doing, all immorality, all sin of every kind. He hates it; he is not indifferent to it, nor tolerant of it, but his whole soul goes out in righteous indignation against it, and he hates it, first, *because he is infinitely pure.* If he were not himself perfectly pure, he might tolerate or excuse sin; but the delicate, matchless purity of his nature causes his holy anger to burn with a fierce flame against everything that is unrighteous. A pure and holy God must hate sin.

He hates it, too, *because it is such an injury to you, his creatures;* and, therefore, he says to you, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." He hates it because it so grievously mars what he made perfect. Sin has spoiled all the beauty of God's highly-favoured creature, man. I cannot tell what a perfectly lovely being Adam was before he fell, but I am sure that both Adam and Eve, in their unfallen state, must have had about them a matchless grace, to which their loveliest sons or most beautiful daughters cannot now attain; and this also I know, that, if you have a face most exquisitely fashioned and well proportioned, yet when evil passions rage behind it, it looks positively diabolical. On the other hand, a man who is truly converted to God, and living to bless his fellow-men, even though he has only ordinary features, has real beauty about him which we can all perceive. I have seen a very plain woman, who has been full of love to Christ, and who has consecrated herself to his service, look quite lovely when the grace of Christ has shone through her face, and illumined her whole life. But God hates sin because it spoils men and women, not only in face, but especially in heart. Men and women, as God sees them, are rendered ugly through sin; any beauty that the sinner may possess is marred in the sight of the Most High, and he cannot look upon it except with abhorrence. Besides, whence comes the sweat on our brow but from our sin? Whence come these aches and pains, but from our sin? Whence come the thorns and thistles, which we must dig up with hard toil, but from our sin? Whence come yon hillocks in the churchyard, those graves that cause so many hearts to break, but from our sin? And because sin works such havoc upon the creatures he has made, God hates it.

God hates it, too, *because it drives him to do what he dislikes doing.* Isaiah tells us that judgment is "his strange work," a work at which he is not so much at home as in his works of mercy and grace; and his own words confirm the prophet's testimony: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Though he must smite the guilty, it is, as it were, with his left hand that he smites, for he would far rather that they turned unto him, and lived. Yet God must be just, for he would cease to be God if he were not just, and if he did not punish sin; but, in effect, it is sin that has put the sword into God's hand, and made the chains that men must wear for ever, and lit the fires eternal that never can be quenched. O souls, God hates sin for your sakes,

and he cries to you, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

To me, the most touching thing in my text is God's pleading with men: "Oh, do not do it; do not do it. Do not live any longer in sin. 'Do not this abominable thing that I hate.'" It is such wondrous condescension on God's part thus to plead with sinners. It is the act of a king to command, but here it is more like a father who persuades, expostulates, implores, entreats: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." It is God dealing with men in earnest solemness; a suppliant to them, as it were, saying to them, "Oh, do not this abominable thing!" This kind of language is suitable for us to use towards God; we may well cry, "Oh, do not smite me; do not condemn me!" But, here, God takes the suppliant's place, and cries to us, "Oh, do not destroy yourselves! Do not force me to punish you. Do not reject my love. Do not despise my Son. Do not refuse my mercy. Do not neglect my call. Do not continue in sin,—'this abominable thing that I hate.'" It is as though God had such sympathy with men that he stood and pleaded with them, as a man's own mother or father might with him. Have you never heard a mother or a father, when a child has seemed to be determined to follow an evil course, saying, "Do not so, my child; I pray you, do not so"? Will such wrong-doing hurt the father? Not personally. Will it injure the mother? No, not in her own person; but, somehow, parents so identify themselves with their children that they do suffer when their children sin, and they say to them, "Do not so; oh, I beg you, do not so, lest, in injuring yourselves, you also bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave." It is wonderful that God, whose thunders shake the heavens, should say to his fallen, rebellious creatures, "Do not so." I wish I knew how to repeat these words; but my tongue may not even attempt the impossible task, for I cannot speak as God did when he said, "'Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.' I hate it for your sake. I hate it for its own sake. Do not grieve me. Do not vex me. I grieve because it injures you, and I am vexed because of the misery and woe it will surely bring upon you unless you repent."

The greatest wonder of it all is,—and with this I must close,—that God not only pleaded thus with men once, but he did it many times, for he sent prophet after prophet, and this was always the message he gave to each of them, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." I can conceive of a prince, in very great pity to an erring subject, saying to him, "Do not so; do not so;" but I cannot conceive of a great potentate again, and again, and again, and again, and again, with tears, coming to a subject, and saying, "Oh, do not break my law! Do not this abominable thing." But hear it, O ye heavens, and be astonished, O earth, as this strange story is told to you! God has pleaded with some here for twenty years;—twenty years of patience,—twenty years of rejected love. Twenty years, did I say? With many of you, it is thirty, or even forty years; you know it is so. Forty years long was the Lord tried by the children of Israel in the wilderness; and forty years long has he

been tried by many who are still alive. Would you have had patience with anybody who had vexed you for forty days? Some of you cannot keep your tempers for forty seconds; certainly you boil over in less than forty hours; yet God has had patience with you for forty years. Ay, and all that while some of you have been hearers of the gospel; or, if you have not regularly gone to hear it, you might have done so, for it has been preached quite close to you; the most of you have been living in a city that is well provided with the means of grace. I said forty years, but in some cases it is fifty years; and there is one, over yonder, with whom it is now sixty years of slighted love and divine compassion. Is there one with whom it is seventy years? Seventy-five years? Eighty years? Perhaps it is even so, and yet still you are despising your God, and neglecting your own soul. How I wish that I knew how to say to you, in God's name, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." Come, friend, give up your sin; renounce your folly; trust in Christ; ask God to receive you. Say, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned." If you go to him with that confession, you may be sure that he will receive you; else he would never have sent you to-night's pleading message. He would not have spared you to be here if he had not meant to accept you when you seek his face. Remember, the way of salvation is by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. You trust him, and then, by his grace, he helps you to overcome sin; he gives you a new nature, and you become saved. Trust him now. The service is almost over, and the clock has struck the hour for closing, but mercy's hour has not yet struck. God still waiteth to be gracious. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Trust him now. May he enable you so to do, by his infinite mercy! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JEREMIAH I.

Verses 1—3. *The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: to whom the word of the* LORD *came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.*

Jeremiah was a young man when he was called to the prophetic office; and he was sent of God, as a young prophet, to help the young king, Josiah. His public life, therefore, opened somewhat happily. But, after the death of Josiah, wicked kings sat upon the throne, and it was the painful lot, and yet in some respects the choice privilege, of this weeping prophet to be sent upon his Master's errand, time after time, to a disobedient and gainsaying people, who wrought him only evil while he sought their good.

The Holy Spirit, you see, is careful to note important dates in the history of God's servants; and you and I also should keep a record of the

times when God sets us to work, and when he gives us special grace for the service to which he has called us.

4—6. *Then the word of the* LORD *came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord* GOD *! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.*

He was but young, and, when young men are called to be ambassadors for God, it behoves them to feel the weight of the responsibility that rests upon them, and to be conscious of their lack of experience, and of their want of fitness for the work. In that consciousness of unfitness, there often lies the evidence of their fitness for the task entrusted to them. Peradventure, out of weakness they shall be made strong; but if they do not feel their weakness, they are not likely to cry to God for help, or to receive it from him. "Ah, Lord God!" said young Jeremiah, "behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child."

7. *But the* LORD *said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.*

Now, even a child can often speak anything that has been said to him; to repeat what he is told to say, is not beyond his capacity; and, after all, this is a Christian minister's principal work. Somebody says, "We want thinkers." Yes, so we do; but we want men whose thoughts shall be subordinate to the thoughts of God, ministers who do not come to utter their own thoughts, but to deliver their Master's message, to tell to us what he has told to them. Is that sermon merely what you think, sir? Then, what do I care what you think? What is that to me, any more than what I think may be to you. If, however, you can come to me, and say, "Thus saith the Lord," I will give diligent heed to your message, and I am bound to receive it; but woe be to that minister whose word shall be other than this!

8. *Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith* the *LORD.*

When a king sends an ambassador to a foreign court, he cannot usually go with him; but God's ambassador always has his King with him. Oh, what courage he ought to have with such a Companion!

9. *Then the* LORD *put forth his hand, and touched my mouth.*

For you young brethren who are to be preachers of the gospel, I cannot wish anything better than that the Lord may touch your mouth in this way. In the old times that some of us remember, godly men used to pray that the Holy Spirit would be "mouth, matter, and wisdom" to the preachers of the Word. It was not at all a bad prayer, for it was a petition that he would give to his servants the right subject, the right spirit, and the right utterance,—that he would teach them how to speak, what to speak, and in what spirit to speak it.

9. *And the* LORD *said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.*

That is a true picture of a Spirit-sent preacher of the gospel,—a man who has God's words in his mouth. I said before that the minister must not utter his own thoughts, but here we see that he must not even utter his own words. God's thoughts are best delivered in God's words; and the more of Scripture there is in our teaching, the more true, the more divine, and the more powerful, will it be.

10. *See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.*

What a mysterious power rested on this God-sent messenger! Poor Jeremiah was often in prison, frequently at death's door, yet he was the

master of nations and kingdoms, and the Lord gave him authority to root them up or to plant them, to throw them down or to build them up. What wondrous power God gives to those who faithfully preach his Word! Well might Mary Queen of Scots say that she was more afraid of John Knox's preaching than of all the armies that came against her.

11—14. *Moreover the word of the* LORD *came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the* LORD *unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it. And the word of the* LORD *came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north. Then the* LORD *said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.*

The Chaldeans and the Babylonians were like a great cauldron, boiling and seething, sending forth smoke and steam over the nations, and ready to scald Jerusalem to its destruction.

15, 16. *For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the* LORD; *and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.*

God tells Jeremiah that he was about to destroy Jerusalem because of the people's sin. He was not merely to foretell their doom, but he was also to tell the reason of it,—that it was the result of their sin, and especially of the sin of idolatry, to which mankind is ever exceedingly prone. It is most difficult to keep men to pure spiritual worship,—the worship of the unseen God in spirit and in truth. They will get away, if they can, to some outward form or another. They will take the very bread of communion, and worship it; or the image of the bleeding Saviour, and make an idol of that. Somehow or other, they will have something visible, or tangible, as the object of their adoration. Men will fall into idolatry of one kind or another even to this day; and this is a God-provoking offence, from which may the Lord, in his mercy, graciously preserve all of us perfectly clear!

17. *Thou therefore gird up thy loins,*—

"Thou hast a hard task before thee, Jeremiah, a stern life's work cut out for thee; 'therefore gird up thy loins,'"—

17. *And arise,*—

"There must be no waiting, no idleness: 'Arise,'"—

17. *And speak unto them all that I command thee:*

"Do not trim it at all, or pare it down, or omit distasteful portions; but 'speak unto them all that I command thee.'"

17. *Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.*

We ought to be so afraid of God that we are afraid of nobody else.

"Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear."

Send all your fears to heaven, and there let them stop.

18, 19. *For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the* LORD, *to deliver thee.*

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE OFT-REPEATED INVITATION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 29TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, July 10th, 1881.

"And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."—Revelation xxii. 17.

OUR morning's discourse* was upon the first part of this verse: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come;" and I tried to show that everyone who has truly heard the gospel call is bound to go forth, and in his turn cry to others, "Come to Jesus." But if every hearer of the gospel is to say, "Come," certainly every preacher of it is specially called to repeat the invitation again and again. I seemed, this morning, to have it laid upon my own heart that, the very next time I entered the pulpit, I must take care to make this call the burden of my discourse, as I ask you, dear friends, also to make it the burden of yours. "Let him that heareth say, Come;" but let him that preacheth say it with a more distinct emphasis than anyone else. So, to-night, I daresay that my message will appear to some of you to be monotonous, for I shall strike the same note again, and again, and again, and bring out from it only this one sound, "Come, Come, Come;" yet let me tell you that, if God shall bless that invitation, and sinners do come to Christ, there will be more music evoked from this note than if my sermon had been as brilliant as the highest human eloquence could make it, for angels in heaven and God himself will rejoice if sinners are brought to the Saviour.

People used to say of George Whitefield,—who commonly finished up his discourse by crying, "Come to Jesus," with his hands uplifted, and his eyes streaming with tears,—that, when he was hard up for an idea, he always cried, "O sinners, come to Jesus!" God be praised if all preachers imitate him in that respect when they are hard up for an idea, for I know of no idea that could possibly equal in value an earnest, simple, loving, gospel invitation. How that man of God would stand on Kennington Common or Moorfields,

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,608, "The Double 'Come.'"

and cry, in trumpet tones, "Come, O come! Why will ye not come? Come now to Jesus"! The best of it is that his cries were not in vain, for the people did come; they came by hundreds and thousands unto him who said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

I. In handling my text, I am going to make a few remarks, and this shall be the first of them. I call upon every unconverted person, here present, who hears the message of my text, to notice THE GREAT SOLEMNITY OF THE INVITATION: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

To my mind, the solemnity of this invitation lies partly in the fact that *it is placed at the very end of the Bible*, and placed there because it is the sum and substance, the aim and object of the whole Bible. It is like the point of the arrow, and all the rest of the Bible is like the shaft and the feathers on either side of it. We may say of the Scriptures what John said of his Gospel, "These are written,"—all these books that are gathered together into one grand library called the Bible,—"these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." So far as you are concerned, this blessed Book has missed its purpose unless you have been led by it to come to Christ. It is all in vain that you have a Bible, or read your Bible, unless you do really "take the water of life" of which it speaks. It is worse than vain, for if it is not a savour of life unto life to you, it shall be a savour of death unto death. Therefore it seems to me that this is a very solemn invitation, because all the books of the Bible do, in effect, cry to sinners, "Come to Jesus." All the prophets of the Bible, all the apostles of the Bible, all the threatenings of the Bible, all the promises of the Bible, gather themselves up, and focus themselves into this one burning ray, "Come to Jesus. Come, and take the water of life freely." Oh, that it might burn its way right into your heart! It is the very end of the Bible, then,—the end of the Bible in two senses,—its end and its object that you should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The solemnity of my text lies also in another thing, for *it might have been something very different.* It says, "Ye thirsty ones, come and drink the water of life." But shall I tell you what it might have said? Let me read to you the 11th verse of this chapter: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." I am devoutly thankful that I have not to come to this rail, and to say to you, "My unconverted hearers, you may listen to me if you like, but it will be of no use. You are unconverted, and so you always must be. You are unjust, and you always must be unjust. You are filthy, and you always must be filthy." God might have sent me with that heavy message of woe; but it is a sweetly solemn thought to my heart that, instead of doing so, he has bidden me say, "Ye unjust, come to the just One, and be made just by him. Ye filthy, come to the water of life, and wash and be clean." God is not yet dealing with you according to his infinite justice; it is mercy that rules this hour. Mercy is flowing through this place like a life-giving river; will ye

not drink and live? No axe is yet uplifted to smite the sinner; it is still bound up in the rods that mercy has tied around it, and there is no order to unfasten the cords. Love, grace, welcome,—these are the sort of words we can still use; and I pray God that you may be glad that it is so, and give most earnest heed to these words lest you should have to listen to a message of quite another character. Look, for instance, at the 15th verse: "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Did I hear you say, "We are not dogs, nor sorcerers," and so on? Perhaps you are not, yet you may be loving and making a lie; and you are doing so if you are trusting in your own righteousness, and cherishing the notion that you do not need a Saviour. If you who are unconverted do not need a Saviour, then the gospel is a monstrous folly, and the death of Christ upon the cross was a superfluity, not to be praised, but to be condemned. O sirs, do not love or make that lie; but now, while Christ is freely preached to you, come, I pray you, and listen to his wooing words! Take him now, and have him for ever.

Suppose that, instead of my having to say to you, "Come to Jesus," you heard a voice, loud as the thunder when the very heavens seem to crack and rend, shouting to you, "*Come to judgment.*" Suppose you heard the trumpet of the archangel announcing that Christ had come from heaven with his mighty angels, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." You will hear it one day; you may hear it within an hour; you must hear it before long; and this will be the chief note of it,—

"Come to judgment!
Come to judgment, come away!"

Would to God that ye would listen now to the voice that cries, "Come to mercy! Come and find mercy now, that you need not fear the great day of judgment, come when it may."

That, then, is my first remark,—that the invitation of the text has a very solemn setting.

II. Now, secondly, I want you to notice, in the invitation before us, THE SUITABILITY OF ITS PROVISIONS: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

That is just what you need; *your greatest need is life.* Merely to breathe, and eat, and drink, is not, according to God's notion, living. That is a mere animal kind of life, and there is a far better and higher life than anything that men know about until God's grace quickens them, and makes them truly to live. Life is needed by every unconverted man and woman; life,—not merely an outward change of life, or a reformation, but the reception of a new life by regeneration, as our Lord said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." There are some things that you may be or may not be, but this is a *must* be: "Ye must be born again."

Our text speaks of "the water of life" which men are bidden to take, and which God most freely gives. It is called "the water of life" because *it quenches thirst.* A man may scarcely know what

thirst of soul really is even when he has begun to experience it; he has a sense of unrest, and a desire for something that he does not possess. He does not know what that something is, but he knows that something is lacking; that is one indication of thirst of soul. And when the Spirit of God comes, and deals with a man, he gets a still more intense sense of uneasiness and unhappiness, and the pangs of desire are still more acute within him. Thirst is a very strong form of desire. Hunger may be somewhat appeased by various expedients, but I have been told that the pangs of thirst are terrible in the extreme; when it really burns a man, it is like a fierce fire raging within him. So, when a soul wants, desires, longs, and pines for this unknown boon, it does not know what it really does want, but its one need is a Saviour. It wants renewal, it wants forgiveness, it wants life; and God here, in our text, presents the blessing to mankind under the figure of "the water of life," which removes the thirst of the soul, refreshes the drooping spirit, and cleanses the whole life. Oh, that men would but take it, and take it at once!

My dear hearer, let me assure you that, *in the gospel, there is exactly what you require.* Have you been trying to make yourself better, and yet you are conscious that you are no better? The gospel, received by faith, will make you better. Are you unhappy? Do you long to find something that will give you peace? The gospel would give you peace if you would only believe it. You say that you want to get away from your old sinful self, and to be made anew. Well, in the gospel that great work is provided for; and many here can testify that, by its means, they have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. There is a black past in your history, that you would fain forget; but in the gospel there is revealed the fountain that can wash out all its stains. Perhaps some of you are dreading the dangerous future; but in the gospel there is ample protection for all that lies before you. Possibly, to some of you, the present is a time of great darkness; but in the gospel there is light for the present; yes, joy even for this moment in which you seem to be driven almost to despair. When I preach about the water of life, so freely given by God, I mean just this,—that all you need between here and heaven Christ is ready to give you. All that your soul can possibly require to enable you to stand in the presence of God without fear, and to dwell in the bosom of God for ever, made perfectly like to God by his grace,—all that is in the gospel for you; and we are bidden to invite you to partake of it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I think the thought of the suitability of the provision of the gospel for me, is one that is worth dwelling upon. I have always felt, since I believed the gospel, that it was made on purpose for me. If it does not suit any other man, it exactly fits me; and if you try it, my hearer, you will find that it exactly fits you also. The Lord knows your measure, and he has made it just the right size and shape for you; there is not a particle of your being which the gospel cannot cover. There is not a wish in your heart, which ought to be there, that the gospel will not gratify. If you accept it, it will fill

you to the brim with happiness, and you shall overflow with exceeding joy of heart in the treasure which Christ has brought to you.

III. But I must hasten on to notice, in the third place, THE FREENESS OF THIS GIFT, because our text says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The gospel is priceless in value, but it is to be had "without money and without price." The salvation of God can never be purchased. I am amazed that anyone should ever cherish the idea of a man buying a place for himself in heaven. Why, the very streets are paved with gold exceeding rich and rare, and a rich man's whole fortune would not buy a single paving-stone in those golden streets. There is nothing that you can ever bring to God as the purchase-money for salvation. He is infinitely rich; what does he want of yours? If thou art righteous, what dost thou want from him? The impossibility of salvation by human merit or good works ought to be clear to every thinking man. If we do all that God bids us do, we are doing no more than we ought to do, and even then we are unprofitable servants.

You may offer whatever terms you please, but God will never sell Christ. Judas did that; but the Father never will. He gives him freely to all who are willing to have him, but he will never sell him; he will never barter and chaffer with you concerning him,—so much alms and so much repentance, and then you shall have Christ. No, sirs; I tell you again that my Lord will never degrade his well-beloved Son by bargaining with you about him. Will you have him for nothing? I hear people say, sometimes, that certain things cannot be had "for love or money." Well, God will not give Christ for money, but he will give him out of pure love to you. If you will have him freely, and for nothing, the great transaction is done, he is yours, and you have him; but if you bring anything to pay for him, you cannot have him. If all the stars in the sky were worlds of gold, and you could carry them all in your girdle, and then take them out, and throw all those starry treasures down upon the floor of heaven as the price of a single gleam of divine love, you could not buy it. Solomon said, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned;" and if a man could give the whole universe, he could not purchase the love of God. No; yet you can have Christ for nothing, now, at once, just where you are, if you will take him on God's terms. Will you have him? Oh, that we would as freely take as God freely gives! And why, since God is willing to give, should I be unwilling to receive? O my heart, my heart, my heart, why art thou unwilling to receive,—unwilling to be saved,—unwilling to be pardoned,—unwilling to have Christ for nothing? Fool that thou art! I might truly say this of myself if I were unwilling to accept God's free gift. If I had some gold to give away to-night, I should not need to say much to induce you to have it. The other day, I saw a diamond, which was said to be worth a hundred thousand pounds; and if I had it here, and said, "Dear hearer, you may have it, and have it for nothing;" the only conceivable reason why any of you would hesitate to take it would be because you might not believe me.

Otherwise, you would all cry out at once, "Thank you, sir; pass it over here; have you any more diamonds to dispose of on the same terms?" Everybody would be willing to accept it for nothing; but when we preach Christ and his gospel, then men want to buy the priceless treasure; they want to feel something, or to be something, or to do something, or else they will not have them. I have no warrant to offer Christ to any man in exchange for the payment of even a penny; but I do declare that he is to be given freely, according to my text, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

IV. Now I pass on to make a further remark, and that is concerning THE WONDERFUL SIMPLICITY OF THE WAY OF SALVATION. Two words describe it here: "Let him that is athirst *come*. And whosoever will, let him *take*."

Surely everybody understands those two words. Take the first: "*Come*." If a physician should advertise that every person who was sick might come to him, you would know what that meant. If you were sick, you would soon be at his door if you could anyhow get there, and you would put yourself into his hands if you believed him to be able to cure you. Treat the Lord Jesus Christ as you would treat an eminent physician; that is, go to him. "Where is he?" you ask. "I know how to go to an earthly physician, I either walk or ride to his house or consulting-room." Well, you can stand still, and yet come to Christ; because we reach him by mental travelling, not bodily travelling. Think of Christ; that is the way to come to him. Think much of Christ; that is still further on the way to him. Believe him, believe in him, believe on him;—that is, trust him, and all is done. As soon as you have trusted Christ, you are a saved man, or woman, or child. That very trust of yours is an evidence that your heart is changed; you would never have trusted the Son of God with your soul if salvation had not already come to your house. Now, that is coming to Christ,—just putting yourself into his hands.

The other word is quite as simple: "*Take*." Everybody knows what it is to take anything; to take water, for instance, and the text says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Well, what does a man do when he takes water? Perhaps he has a hand that trembles so much that he can hardly hold the glass or cup that contains the water, yet he takes it. Anybody can take water; there is no need to send a child to school to teach him how to take it; he puts it to his mouth, and it flows down. That is all; and that is exactly how, in a spiritual sense, we take the water of life, and take Christ himself. There is another passage, you know, which says, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth;" and, as I have often told you, when anything is in your mouth, and you want to keep it, the proper thing to do with it is to swallow it, that is all. I do not know how to make the process of receiving Christ more simple than that. You smile, dear friends, but the very essence of the gospel lies in receiving Christ like that; it is taking into yourself what God freely gives to you, that is all.

"Come, . . . take;" "come, . . . take;" "come, . . . take;"—

not run, fly, leap, bring;—no, "come, . . . take." Oh, that you could all see how simple is this wondrous plan of salvation! The other day, there passed away one who had, as I judge, been a believer for years, but it had always been a question with her friends whether she was a believer or not; and she said to my brother, when upon her death-bed, "The simplicity of the gospel has been a stumbling-block to me all my life; but now that I am about to die, instead of being a stumbling-block, it is my delight, for what should I do now without the simple gospel, 'Believe and live'?" She was a very good Churchwoman, one of the best I ever knew; she always observed all fast days and feast days, and did all manner of good things, she never seemed to do anything wrong, but always to do what was right. Yet those are just the people who find it difficult to yield to Christ, because of their self-righteousness. But whoever you may be, you will have to come down to God's terms if you wish to be saved. There is only one door to heaven, and but one way for the worst and for the best. You must bow down, and accept Jesus as the sinners' Saviour, or else you cannot have him at all. God's terms are, "Come, . . . take." So, do not try any other plan; do not say, "Well, I will bring something." Do not bring anything; it is not what you bring to Christ, but what you take of Christ that will save you. Therefore hear and heed the message of the text; God make you to hear it in your very soul! It is the true gospel message: "Come, . . . take."

V. My fifth remark is this, NOTICE THE BREADTH OF THE GOSPEL INVITATION: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

I will suppose that I am addressing a person who is very anxious about his soul; one who has been for weeks or perhaps for months seeking salvation, but who has not found it. I take him by the hand, and I say, "My dear friend, you are the very individual to whom my text refers. You know that the first part applies to you: 'Let him that is athirst come.' You have an earnest desire to be saved, you have that thirst of which the text speaks, so come, and take the water of life freely."

Yet even while I am speaking, I can see another brother, and I know that he is groaning, and saying, "Oh, I wish I had that thirst! I wish I had that desire, but I have not any. I do not feel anything; all that I do feel is that I wish I did feel; but I do not feel at all." Come along, my friend, you are another of the very men that I am sent to seek, for the second part of the text says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The first net has somewhat wide meshes, so some little fish slip through it; but the second one has very small meshes. I wish it would catch the very smallest fishes,—the sprats or the whitebait,—I mean, those persons who have the least possible desire to be saved. "Whosoever will." "Whosoever will." "Oh! I am willing enough," says one, "but perhaps, after all, I am not one of those persons who are invited." Oh, but it says, "*Whosoever* will." I am very fond of that word "whosoever." I think that the translators have left "whosoever" out in some places; may the Lord forgive them, and teach

them better! But we shall always keep it in even if they do leave it out; and I am sure it ought to be here: "whosoever will." It is a word that the Holy Spirit has blessed to thousands of souls, and he has not blessed a lie or a blunder, so I am quite sure that it is "whosoever will." We will stick to that, we must have that glorious word: "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Oh, but he is a very poor man!" What does that matter? "Whosoever will." "But he is a very ignorant man, he does not even know his letters." What has that to do with the text? "Whosoever will." "Ah, but he has been a very bad man!" Well, what about that? It is "whosoever will." Does he will to trust Christ? Is he willing to take the water of life? Then, "let him take the water of life freely." "Oh, but!" says one, "he is an out-of-the-way sinner altogether; you do not know how shamefully he has behaved." No, and I do not want to know; but I do know that, if he will but take the water of life, he may do so, for the text says, "whosoever will." There is no limit to the mercy of God to all who trust his dear Son, and there is no limit to you but that which your own will imposes. If you *nil* it, that is, make nothing of it, then it shall be *nil*, that is, nothing to you; but if you *will* it, it is God's will that you should have it. When your will is brought to accept the Saviour, then, depend upon it, it is God's will that you should have him. "Whosoever will." "Whosoever." I cannot conceive, in any language, a wider sweep of word than that; so come along, poor troubled sinner, come to Jesus Christ; accept him, and you shall be saved here and now.

VI. Now I close with the last remark, which concerns THE EARNESTNESS OF THIS CALL ON GOD'S PART: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Who is the person that invites? Listen. First, it is *the Holy Spirit*,—gentle, loving, tender, gracious, mysterious, adorable, divine. He says, "Come." The Spirit that brooded over the chaos in the first creation, and brought forth order, says, "Come, and be made anew in Christ Jesus." Who is it, next, that says, "Come"? "*The bride*"—that is, the entire Church of God. All the people of God cry to you, "Come." Those on earth, and those in heaven, too; if you could hear them speak out of the excellent glory, you would know that the very joy they have in Christ moves them to call you to join them. They are leaning over the battlements of heaven, and beckoning you to Christ. The bride, that is, the whole Church in heaven and on earth, says, "Come, come."

And then, next, *everyone who hears the gospel* is bidden to say to you, "Come." Because the Lord knew how hard you would be to convince, he has told everybody who hears the gospel to try and bring you: "Let him that heareth say, Come." If you were to receive an invitation to a feast, it is possible that you would go the first time you were asked; but if you had a dozen letters inviting you to-morrow morning, you would say, "Dear me, this is very remarkable; I have twelve letters, from twelve different people, all inviting me to this banquet." Suppose, when you went out of your door in the morning, there was a servant who stood there, and said,

"Sir, I have come to invite you to the banquet." "Why, dear me!" you would say, "I have been invited a dozen times already." During the day, there comes a telegraphic invitation to this same banquet; perhaps you do not think much of that; but when you get home, your wife says, "Dear, I want to invite you to go to that banquet." You smile, and possibly you put even her off; but there comes in a dear child of yours, and he says, "Father, I have been to that gentleman's house to a banquet, and he has asked me to give you an invitation, and I do so want you to go to it." You could hardly refuse that; and if, every time you met fifty or a hundred people, they all invited you to go, you would at last say, "Well, I really must go; for it seems such a strange thing that everybody is inviting me." That is just the case with some of you here. We mean never to let you have any rest till you come to Christ. I have heard that there are some friends about this Tabernacle who "bother" people concerning their souls; and I hope they will keep on "bothering" them. They will not let them come and go out of this building without having an earnest word with them; I hope it will always be so. We have some brethren here who are sharp-shooters; they are just now lying low in the rifle-pit, taking aim at some of you; and they will shoot at you before you get away to-night. I hope they will hit you, too, because whosoever hears the gospel is bidden to say to others, "Come." You will get girdled round with a ring of invitations, for God means to bless you; and, therefore, if you escape one, he will not let you escape another.

Listen further. *The Lord Jesus Christ himself says, "Come."* On one occasion, on the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." And another day our blessed Master said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." So, here is Jesus calling, and the Holy Spirit calling, and his people calling; even the prophet Isaiah is still calling. Dear good man, he has been in heaven for thousands of years, yet at this moment he cries out of the holy Book, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Why, it is like the old ages, the ancient centuries, come back again to call to you to come to Christ. I hear that call from heaven. I hear Christ calling from the throne. I hear the Spirit calling. I hear the bride calling. I am calling as one of those who have heard the gospel for myself. Listen, then, oh, listen! Was there ever such a chorus of united invitation? Did ever so many hearts combine before about any one thing? Will you not come? Will you not come? Why will ye die? Why will ye die when the water of life flows at your feet?

"Stoop down, and drink, and live."

May God lead you so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—441, 491, 500.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH I. 1—20.

This is a chapter which, I think, teaches an important lesson to those of us who desire the salvation of men, for it shows us how God sets about that work. He begins by exhibiting the sinner's sin to him before he proclaims mercy to him; and if we want to be the means of doing good to men, it will not be by merely crying to them, "Believe, believe, believe;" but there must be a laying of the axe at the root of the tree of self-righteousness, and a cutting away of all trust in self. A man must realize his danger before he will desire to escape from it, and it is a mistaken kindness which refuses to set before him the peril in which he is. God, who is infinitely tender and inconceivably merciful, shows us, in this chapter, how to go to work with sinners.

Verses 1, 2. *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the* LORD *hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

"If they were simply my subjects, I could bear their rebellion better than I can now, for they are my children. I have nourished them, and brought them up; and after long and persevering kindness towards them, I might have expected some affection from them in return: but 'they have rebelled against me.'"

3. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

See how the Lord still owns the children of Israel as his people, though he contrasts their conduct with the behaviour of the ox and the ass. So we see that, however far God's people may have gone into sin, they are his people still, and he does not deny their relationship to him: "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

4. *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters:*

What a terrible picture! A nation burdened with iniquity, as full of sin as their fathers were, and their offspring growing up like themselves. By hereditary transmission they have received a predisposition to evil that cannot be taken out of the blood except by divine power.

4. *They have forsaken the* LORD, *they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

What a description this is of the state of the unregenerate,—even of God's elect among them who are still crushed under the ruins of the fall! Peradventure, as I am reading this chapter, some poor soul here is saying, "That just describes me." Well, let it describe you; and lament, and mourn, and humiliate yourself before the Most High as you realize what is your sad condition. You have acted worse to God than an ass does to its master; you have behaved shamefully to him, and thus you have provoked him to anger. Do not think lightly of your sin, but let it weigh heavily upon your spirit; as you are "laden with iniquity," God grant that it may be a heavy burden to you!

The Lord next goes on to exhibit the sin of the people in the light of his chastisement. When a child sins, and does wrong, a wise parent uses correction to see whether he cannot overcome the evil tendencies; but, alas! there is no correction that will ever get sin out of the sinner. See what God did with these people, and what came of it.

5, 6. *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

"You are already in this terrible plight, and your sufferings are the direct result of your sins."

7, 8. *Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*

Now, to translate all this into plain English, I have known men who have been chastened for their sins, and by their sins; God has chastised them, and they have been severely chastised; but no obedience, no repentance, has followed upon the chastisement. Men have been brought, by their sin, from wealth to poverty, from competence to actual want. Have we not seen them by drunkenness brought to rags, and by vice brought to rottenness? Have we not seen men brought to the very gates of hell by their iniquities, yet still they have clung to those iniquities? They have begun to drink the cup of their own damnation, and even when they realized what they were doing, they have still clutched the burning chalice in their hands, and have willingly drained it to the last dregs. Oh, it is horrible, it is terrible, to see at what a cost men will ruin their own souls! They go to perdition as if they were at a steeplechase; no hedge is too high, and no brook too wide for them, and they ride to destruction at a desperate pace. If we who are God's people were half as earnest in serving him as the ungodly are in their efforts to be lost, what great service we should render to him! God reminded these people of all that he had done to them by way of chastening; yet no good had come of it.

9. *Except the* LORD *of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

I am afraid that this verse applies to London at the present time. To what an awful extent has the sin of the people gone, and among those who commit it are many of the great ones of the earth. It is a crying iniquity, which may well make God angry. I marvel not that there are alarms, and all sorts of frightful rumours in the city which has become like Sodom and Gomorrah of old.

10. *Hear the word of the* LORD, *ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.*

Isaiah next goes on still further to expose the sin of the people; and, anticipating that they would say that they had been very religious, that they had attended the means of grace, that they had been observant of the outward ritual of God's sanctuary, he admits the truth of it all, and then shows what is the real value of it.

11, 12. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the* LORD: *I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

Have not some of you at times felt as if the Lord had said to you, "What right have you to be among my people?" For years, you have been worshipping professedly, but not sincerely. It is a wonder that the seat you sit on bears you up when your worship has been all hypocrisy, a delusion throughout; you have only given to God the external husk of devotion, the kernel of true heart-worship has never been there at all.

13, 14. *Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.*

When God is wearied by a man's best things, what must his feelings be concerning the man's worst things?

15. *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

When even a man's prayers become an abomination in the sight of God, what must the man himself be? As long as men live in sin, and love it, God will not hear their supplications. Whether their hands are stained with blood, or whatever other sin it is of which they are guilty, until they forsake the evil, God will not answer their prayers.

The Lord, having thus set before the people their sin, the aggravation of that sin in that they had continued in it after severe chastisement, and the further aggravation of it in that, all the while, they had professed to be true and faithful servants of Jehovah, though they had been in constant rebellion against him, he yet goes on to speak to them in this gracious fashion:—

16, 17. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

That is to say, "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance, so that it may be seen that your heart is really changed, and that you desire better things, and things more pleasing in my sight." Then listen further to this marvellous message:—

18. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the* LORD: *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

There is not as much music, to a poor convinced sinner's ear, in a whole oratorio of Handel as there is in this one verse of Scripture. But your ear must be attuned to this music before you can appreciate its blessed sweetness. He only knows the music of mercy who knows the misery of sin. I think that I must read this precious verse again: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet,"—we will not dispute about them; they are all you think they are, and much worse;—"though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

19. *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:*

"You shall not any longer be 'as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city;' you shall be no more desolate, but 'ye shall eat the good of the land.' I will take away from you my chastisement when I take away your sin. I will take care to feed you if you will but come back to me. There shall be feasting, and music, and dancing, instead of starving, and sighing, and sorrowing, if you will only return to your Father's house: 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.'"

20. *But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the* LORD *hath spoken it.*

So the Lord has mercy in his right hand for those who will turn from their sin; but he has a sword in his left hand for those who will abide in their iniquities.

God grant to us grace now to yield to the sweet reasoning of his love, and to turn from our sins, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE DECEIVED HEART.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 5TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, in the summer of 1858.

"He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"—Isaiah xliv. 20.

THE prophet, no doubt, is here primarily referring to the heathen; he accounts for the fact of their gross stupidity, in bowing down to worship blocks of wood and stone, by asserting that their deceived hearts had turned them aside so that they never sought to know the truth, nor asked the question whether their idol was not a delusion and a snare. The idolater practically never said, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" With the immediate connection of my text, however, I shall have, at this time, very little to do. I shall only attempt to draw from it a few lessons, which I trust may be useful to some persons, if God, the blessed Spirit, shall be pleased to apply the truth to their hearts.

There is but one true religion, and there is only one way of receiving that religion. There are many false religions, and there are many wrong ways of professing the true religion. There are a thousand paths that lead to hell, but only one that leads to heaven. In the many broad roads that lead to destruction there is room for innumerable winding alleys; but the way that leads to heaven is a strait and narrow one, there is no room for any divergence there. We must have the same religion, and have it in the same way, or else we shall not arrive at that hoped-for end, towards which, by our profession, we pretend to be pressing.

Now, beloved, there are many persons who are deceived in their religion; they are professing a wrong religion, or else they are holding the right religion in a wrong way. This shall be our first point, that *there are many persons who are entirely deceived in their religion.* We shall, secondly, notice that *their religion is unsatisfactory to them.* We may rest quite certain that any religion that is unsound and untrue, is not satisfactory to the conscience: "He feedeth on ashes." But then we shall have to notice, in the next place, that although that is so, *yet there are many who seem*

perfectly content with their false religion; although, to us, it is clear that they are not satisfied, but are feeding upon ashes, yet they say that they are satisfied with their own condition, the reason being that, as our text puts it, "a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Having briefly run over those particulars, I shall then address myself to the representatives of the different classes of deceived persons, *those who profess religion, but do not possess it*, and shall endeavour, with all the might that God, the Holy Spirit, shall give me, to arouse and awaken them, lest they perish in their strong delusion.

I. In the first place, then, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE ENTIRELY DECEIVED IN THEIR RELIGION.

I need scarcely refer to the *idolater*, who bows himself down before the idol that his own hands have fashioned. However sincere he may be, however devout in his worship, however punctual in the observance of his ceremonies, we are perfectly sure that he is a deceived man; and when we ourselves discover the stupidity of such a form of worship, we marvel that any man should be found so deficient in sense and wisdom as to continue to be deceived by such a travesty of religion.

And I need only, in passing, mention the *Romanist.* He, too, has a false religion; to us it is perfectly clear that he is deceived while he strives, by his good works and by his sacraments, to reach a heaven to which he cannot attain if he seeks it by the works of the law, and not by the righteousness of faith. We know that there is no admittance to heaven save by the blood and the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, relied upon by a divinely-imparted faith. Let the Roman Catholic be as earnest and as devout as he may, let him strive with all his might, and let him carry out his own convictions to the full, yet of this we are sure, beyond a doubt, that he is a deceived man, and that his religion is a thing that is utterly worthless.

On the other hand, we have another class of persons, living in our midst, who pretend to have no religion at all, but who, in fact, have a superstition of their own;—I mean the men who generally class themselves amongst *Freethinkers*, the people who will not believe the Bible, and who cannot walk in the narrow way in which their grandmothers walked, because it would imply a sort of slavery if they were to walk in the way of truth. They think they are bold and brave men, who glory in dashing away the fetters of right, and doing wrong, because of the freedom of it. They think it is a high prize, and a great attainment, when they are able to despise everything which their fellows regard as being venerable and true; and, in fact, one of their greatest ambitions is to strive to reach such a height of impudence that they can laugh at everything that has the stamp of antiquity and truth upon it, and may just let their own wild thoughts fly as they will, without bit or bridle, guide or rein. Now these men, however true they may be to their convictions, we know, are deceived in their religion,—for, after all, it is a religion,—a religion of credulity, and no one is so credulous as the man who

professes not to believe anything. No man is so ready to suck in any delusion as the one who professes to abhor superstition. You will never find anyone so ready to be led astray as the man who says that he cannot be led astray. He who despises the miracles of our Lord, and all that is recorded in the Word of God, is the most gullible creature alive; and we know that, however high his opinion of himself may be, he is a deceived man, and feeds upon ashes.

But, alas! to come nearer home; we have another class of men who are alike deceived in their religion, *false professors*, who, in a sense, have the true religion, but have not got it in the right way. We have some men whose doctrines are orthodox, whose theological views are sound; if they were tried before the Westminster Assembly, they would come off with flying colours. They hold the truth taught in our Catechisms and Creeds, nor do they swerve a hair's-breadth from the technicalities of our doctrine; but, alas! they hold it in a wrong way; they hold the truth of God in licentiousness, or they hold it in hypocrisy. We have some who make a fair profession; but who, after all, have no heart in the matter, and neither part nor lot in the things of God. We have some who have been baptized in the pool, who have never been baptized with the Holy Spirit; some who sit at the Lord's table, and eat the bread and drink the wine, but never have had any real fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We dare not deny the fact that in the purest churches there are men who have, by great craft and subtlety, deceived the fallible judgment of minister, deacons, and brethren. It is not possible for us to keep the church thoroughly pure; let us stand at its gate both night and day, let us watch without sleep, enemies will smuggle themselves in; let us be ever so careful, yet the enemy will creep in, and sow tares among the wheat. We doubt not that there is, in many churches, a far larger proportion of deceived persons than we should like to think; we are afraid that there are many more who will share the doom of Judas than it would be charitable for us to declare. Alas! hypocrisy must be rife in a church that is so cold or lukewarm. There must be far too many in our midst who are not true to God, when the world can point to members of the church, and say, "If these are the children of God, if these are Christians, then better far is it not to make a profession at all than to live as they do." There have been men, who have been looked up to as great and mighty in the church, but who have turned out as black as hell itself; so we are obliged to think that there are still hypocrites here and there, whom the great day shall reveal, but who are at present unknown to us; perhaps hundreds, or even thousands, are to be found in the various churches throughout the length and breadth of our land, who have no solid ground of hope. Although they may be trusting in themselves that they are righteous, they are deceiving themselves, and others, too, and fearful shall be their discovery when the Lord shall strip them of their masks and disguises, and make them naked to their eternal shame.

II. My second remark was that, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY PERSONS THUS DECEIVED IN RELIGION, WE ARE NOT TO SUPPOSE THAT ANY

OF THEM ARE REALLY IN HEART CONTENTED WITH THEIR RELIGION. They may seem to be satisfied with themselves; but we know that, in their innermost spirit, they are not.

Our text says of the idolater that "he feedeth on ashes." You see a man on his knees before his idol god; he has brought an offering to the priest, he kneels down, and repeats his form of prayer; he rises, and you say, "What a clear conscience that man has! That worship is enough for him; he can go to his bed, and rest in peace to-night, for he has said his prayers to his god, he has chanted a solemn litany that may be accepted; and, certainly, with all the forms and ceremonies of his religion, he will have a quiet conscience." But we are very apt to look upon the surface of things, when in reality it is very different down below; and I believe that there is not an idolater beneath the heavens who does not find his religion unsatisfactory. I am fully aware that human nature is fallen, I know that reason has become darkened and blinded; but I do not believe that the idolater's reason is so dark that a ray of light cannot get into it, and therefore I believe that, sometimes, the poor man realizes that there must be a God higher and better than the block of wood or stone which he worships. I cannot conceive, as my own heart could not rest without a Saviour, that another man's could. I think the mind of the heathen has enough light left in it to prevent him from being thoroughly satisfied and contented with his religion. No, it is true, as our text says, that "he feedeth on ashes." He must know that his religion is but as refuse on an ash heap,—something that degrades, but can never content him.

It is just the same with the Romanist. He will tell you, when he converses with you, that he is quite contented with his religion; but I cannot believe it. There may be times when he is so imposed upon as to believe that, in his church, there is infallible salvation, and that, by attention to ceremonies as absurd and wicked as those of idolaters, he shall obtain the favour of the Lord his God; but there are hours when Romanists, especially in this country, must tremble for the stability of their religion, there are times when they must be a little shaken. Surely there is enough of moral dignity and conscience in most men to teach them that a rotten rag cannot have any saving virtue about it. Surely the man, who has kissed the toe of the Pope, must feel everything within him that is noble recoil from the act. There ought to be enough humanity in man to rise above that grovelling system which has sought to bring human nature lower than the dregs of the brute creation. I cannot suppose that a man, who has a soul,—a soul whose high aspirations are among the best proofs of its immortality, can be contented with that poor piece of outside show which we call Popery. No, in that case also, man "feedeth on ashes." He is not satisfied with his religion, although he may pretend to be.

Now, in the next case, I speak with greater confidence still. It is just so with the infidel; "he feedeth on ashes." He says he is very well content to be a Freethinker. He looks you boldly in the face, and he laughs at your fears. As to death, and all that is to come after it, what cares he about such things? He is not a child to be frightened with a

nursery tale; he would as soon think of believing the story of Jack the giant-killer as of Christ on the cross. He is not going to believe what priests tell him. He is quite content to be where he is, and what he is. Yet see him on board ship in a storm,—how is it that he cries to God there? How is it that Volney, the atheist, who took on board a large number of his infidel books to distribute, when a storm arose, fell on his knees, and asked God to give him mercy through Jesus Christ; and then, when he got on shore, cursed the God whose mercy he had implored? A storm soon drives the infidelity out of a man; there is too much manhood left in him to let him continue so base a thing as an infidel. A man may be wicked enough to say that he has arrived at such a pitch of unbelief as to doubt the existence of God; but I do not think anyone has ever really thought so in his heart, except he were entirely demented and bereft of his senses. Infidelity will do very well for you when you can have a heated dance and merry revelry, but sickness and death are tests which it cannot endure. Many have found, then, that the ashes upon which they were feeding were but the preparation for feeding upon the burning coals of the eternal wrath of God.

I must also say that it is the same with the fourth class; that is, the people who make a profession of religion, but who have no religion in their hearts. We know that you are not at ease, we know that you are feeding upon ashes. You come to the baptismal pool and the communion table; you accost the deacon and the pastor with all confidence, you talk of experience even as they talk, and you look as if religion made you happy; but we know better. Nothing can ever make the conscience really quiet, nor give the soul a solid peace, except true religion rightly received in the heart. If there were any other cure for the heartache except the blood of Christ applied to the conscience, surely so costly a remedy need not have been provided. This I know, many of us tried everything else except true religion to give us peace, but we never could find it. We tried obedience to the law, we tried what we could do by a bare profession without religion in the heart, but we never could find rest for the sole of our foot till we came to Christ; and we do not believe that you have any more rest than we had. We believe that your deceived heart has turned you aside, for you are feeding upon ashes even now.

III. But, in the third place, IT IS A STRANGE THING THAT ALL THESE PEOPLE SEEM VERY WELL CONTENTED WITH THEIR FALSE RELIGIONS.

The idolater, the Romanist, the infidel, the mere professor,—all these people seem very well satisfied with themselves and their delusions, and sometimes we marvel how this can be. How can it be that an idolater can think that a piece of wood, part of which has just boiled his kettle, and another part of which has been fashioned into a seat for him to sit upon,—how can he think that the remnant of that wood can become a god? It seems strange to us that the very heathen should not laugh at one another for their folly, and we know that an old poet put this ironical utterance into the mouth of an idol that was set up in a vineyard, "Formerly I

was the stump of a tree, a useless log; and the carpenter hesitated whether to make me into a table or a stool, and therefore he made me a god." We ask, how is it, how can it be, that the heathen can find any satisfaction in so silly a superstition? How is it that the Romanist also can be content with such a mere sham as his religion is? How can the infidel live in such an uncomfortable atmosphere as that cold, credulous unbelief that now surrounds him? How can it be that the mere professor can get peace of mind as he now is, or even that appearance of peace of mind which he is able to keep up when he speaks to us? We answer, the true reason is this. It is not that these men are thoroughly satisfied with their religion; it is not that they themselves firmly believe in it; it is, as the text says, "a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

If they were once honestly to ask that question, it would be fatal to their false religion. Let the infidel just sit down and ask this question, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Let him solemnly, as before the tribunal of his own conscience, if he cannot say it before God, sit down, and examine what he pretends to believe, and fearlessly ask himself, "Is not this a lie?" Let the Romanist do the same, let the idolater do the same, let the false professor do the same; and then, as soon as it had been done, conscience would be at once enlightened, and would give its answer, and each man would say, "Yes, the religion upon which I have been building my hope is a lie, and I renounce it to seek a better."

But the deceived heart does not let that question ever come up; or if it is asked, the question is put away as quickly as possible. Up rises one devil in the heart, and says, "Did not thy grandmother worship that idol? Have not multitudes of other people done the same?" And if the question is asked again, another devil says, "Look at the tens of thousands who go to the shrine of Juggernaut. Are there not millions who bow before the shrine of Bhudda? Common custom shall decide what is right." The Romanist says, "Look at Christendom as a whole; is it not almost everywhere covered with the adherents of my religion?" "And," says the infidel, "I do not stand alone; some of the master spirits of the age have dared to think as I think." "And look," says the man who is making a false profession, "am I not as good as Mrs. So-and-so, and as pious as Mr. This or Mr. That? I am sure that there is no need of any examination of the position that I hold." And so, between them all, the poor heart is so deceived and baffled that the question never really comes before the conscience, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" For I repeat that, if this question were truly to come before the conscience, there could not be any mistake about the answer that even poor fallen reason must give, "Your religion is a lie, therefore away with it."

IV. Now, for the rest of the time at our disposal, I WANT TO SPEAK TO THOSE WHO ARE PROFESSORS OF RELIGION, BUT WHO DO NOT POSSESS IT.

I will introduce myself to you, sir, at once; you have not, for a long time, asked yourself any questions about your religion, will

you honestly put to yourself the enquiry in my text, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" "Well," you reply, "I was baptized, and I joined the church, so many years ago, and I concluded that I was converted; and, at any rate, the church was satisfied with my testimony. I am not troubled with any doubts, or fears, or anxieties; and I am quite sure that if I am not all right, it will go very hard with a great many other people." Yes, sir, I have no doubt it will go very hard with a great many people; but your conclusion does not prevent me from returning to the question so far as it concerns you personally. I want to put this question to you,—Is there not a lie in your right hand? I do not say that you have a lie on your forehead; you would not like to put it there; but is there not a lie in your right hand? Now, come; open your palm. No, I mean your right hand, not your left one; your right hand—that hand with which you act. I do not mean that left hand, which you have been keeping in reserve to lay upon your hypocritical heart; no, it is your right hand that I mean. It is your acts, your life, your conversation that I want to know about; have not these been such as to prove that there is a lie in your right hand? We do not know all your conversation, do we? God knows all, but we do not. You have been able to keep many vices to yourself; or there are many things that you do in business that you know are wrong; so I will again put the question to you,—Is there not a lie in your right hand? Are you quite sure that you are truly converted to God? Do you think, if you were, that you could live as you are living? Do you imagine that the indulgence of such-and-such a vice and such-and-such a sin can be consistent with grace in your heart? Do you suppose that, if you were really the possessor of the grace of God, you could be what you are now? Does not your own conscience say, "No; you have a lie in your right hand"?

If you knew anyone, who was a member of a Christian church, and who lived as you live, would you not be amongst the very first to say, "Such a man ought not to be in the church"? Very well, then, measure your own corn by the same bushel which you use when you are measuring your neighbour's. Do you not, even now, know several people whom you regard as being mere formalists and hypocrites? Have you not, sometimes, said so? Now, what is the difference between yourself and them? Do you not think that, if you could get into their bodies, and look out of their eyes, you could see enough in yourself to condemn you, quite as justifiably as you now condemn them? Ay, I think that if conscience speaks now, it will be obliged to say, "Ah, it is so, sir; alas, it is so!" And then, when conscience hears this question put again, "Does it not look as if you had a lie in your right hand?" how are you to escape from the solemn answer, "I fear I have. If my life is inconsistent with my profession; if my feelings and inward experience are not in conformity with the words that I speak with my lip, then most certainly I must have a lie in my right hand"?

Now, O professor, you who are a mere professor, I will address you yet again; and may God bless the words I speak, to the warning of some who have a name to live and yet are dead! Ah, sir!

you have not had a doubt about your state for a long time; and a true child of God has said, "Oh, that I could get into the place where that man has got, that I could be as easy in my mind as he is!" Little does the child of God know what a miserable fraud thou art, nor how thy deceived heart has beguiled thee. Ah! if he did know it, he would wish to be anything but what thou art. Thy peace is not the result of the assurance of faith; it is only presumption. Thy confidence does not arise from trusting in Christ, but from sheer delusion. There was a time when thou didst tremble for thyself. When first thou wast united to the church, thou didst often ask thyself, "Am I Christ's, or am I not?" Now, all those doubts and fears have vanished, and it is very seldom you ask any question about yourself. You fold your hands, and take it for granted that all is right with you. Are you not, you think, a member of the church; then why should you be asking yourself any searching questions?

When the minister is preaching specially to you, you look up to the gallery, and you see a drunkard, and you say you hope the message will touch his heart. When the minister is saying something strong about inconsistencies, you look across the chapel, and you notice somebody there, and you think surely that ought to reach his conscience. Ah, man, is it not God's message to thee? Ought it not to reach thy conscience; and from the fact that it does not, may we not draw the fearful inference that thou art given up to a strong delusion to believe a lie; that thy deceived heart hath turned thee aside, so that thou hast a thousand artifices and schemes to evade an honest answer to that most important question, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

As God's ambassador, let me clear my conscience of thy blood as I try to reach even thy hardened conscience. Professor, I beseech thee, as in the sight of God, let this question for once come home to thine heart. Oh! ye that have only a profession, let this question be answered by each one of you now, "Is there a lie in *my* right hand? Am I a true Christian or a false professor? Am I making a profession to be what I am not, or am I in the sight of God what I am in the sight of man?" I shall not exempt myself from this solemn self-examination; and I would ask you, my brethren in the ministry, and those of you who are deacons, and all of you who are members of this or any other Christian church, not to exempt yourselves; let the question come home to each of us, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Oh! remember that to have made a profession of religion, and yet to be deceived, is one of the most frightful things to be imagined; and whilst it is so frightful, it is also sadly frequent;—to have our face Zionward by profession, and yet to be going towards hell by our actions; to go with bold, brazen-faced impudence to the very gates of heaven, and cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," and to have those gates fast barred against us, and to hear the Lord say, "Depart from me, I never knew you; depart, ye cursed;" is, I say again, frightful beyond all conception, but it is as frequent as it is frightful. My brother, wouldst thou have that to be thy lot? O

my God, let it never be my portion! If I am to be damned, let it be as the worldling, let me be as the sinner who openly liveth and dieth in his sin; but never suffer me to endure that double hell that consists first in the torment of just punishment for my sin, and then in the added torment of my disappointed hope. O my God, whatever thou sufferest me to be, permit me not to have a hope of heaven, and then, at the last, to have that hope turn out to be a delusion! Do you, my friend, put away the question of the text, and say you know that you are all right? You are the very person who ought to let the question come home to you. Are you sure that all is well with you? Then, mayhap, you have no right to be sure. Do you never doubt? Have you never had any fear about the future? Then, remember what the poet Cowper so wisely said,—

> "He has no hope who never had a fear;
> And he that never doubted of his state,
> He may perhaps—perhaps he may—too late."

Does your confidence stand so firm that nothing can shake it? Perhaps, then, it is not built upon a rock. There are things that stand very firm for a time that, after all, will not endure for ever. The great mountains stand fast, but they shall be removed, and be carried into the midst of the sea; and your hope may seem to have a firm foundation, yet you may find yourself swallowed up in a fearful whirlpool of horrible destruction. I appeal to some men who think that they need not heed my earnest word, men who are not members of Christian churches, but who are reputed to be Christians. There are some among us who are generally reputed to be children of God; their conversation is full of weighty religious matters, no one better understands the truth than they do; yet they have one master vice, one evil propensity that leads them astray every day. In the name of God, I have warned them of the consequences of continuing in sin. As they must stand before Jehovah's bar, and as I, who have warned them, must stand there with them, I do entreat them to let the voice of warning reach them.

O man, it is little to have had a pious mother; it is little to have been enlightened concerning the things of the kingdom; it is little to know the truth, and to love sweet and savoury doctrine; it is little to be a friend of all good men, and to be beloved of them; it is little to have had all this, if thou hast not grace in thine heart. Little! did I say? It is nothing at all to thine advantage; but it is not little, it is a great and fearful thing to have had all these advantages, and all this knowledge, and still to have suffered some base thing, that was beneath thy manhood, to turn thee aside, and destroy all thy hopes of heaven!

There are some, whom we know, who live in this fair world of ours, and who live near our hearts, too; men who might go to heaven, we sometimes think, if it were not that they are too covetous to get there. Some we could not find any fault with, except that they are given to strong drink, and that sin is their curse and ruin, and will for ever shut them outside the gates of paradise. And some we know, whose love we prize, and whose

company we seek, who have some secret fault which now and then is discovered by those who watch them warily; and that fault is like a great cancer, eating up the man's vitals; his clothes are neat and trim, his friends call him "a perfect gentleman"; yet he is carrying damnation in his bowels by that secret lust and darling vice. Oh, ye who are making a boast of your religion, or who keep it secretly, and have some kind of a hope, I beseech you take warning! It is not my pleasure thus to address you; but if I did not speak thus, how should I render in my account at the last great day? If I sat in those pews in which you sit, I would scorn the minister who did not speak faithfully to me, and I would soon cease to be a hearer of such a man. I would not go to a chapel if there were not a man in the pulpit who spoke the truth in ungarnished language; and, as I judge you, you wish to hear the truth plainly. As I would wish it to be told to me, so have I told it to you; and if there should be any individual, whose deceived heart has turned him aside, and who says, "The minister was very personal; he evidently meant *me*. His word was like a sword, and it cut *me* to my very heart;" if that is the case with any of you, let the preacher at once admit that he did mean you; he does not deny that he has been personal; he meant you, and he beseeches you to take his message to your heart. If you are angry with the preacher, he can well afford to bear it. Though he does not wish for it, if your soul can be saved in that way, he will rejoice in it. If there could be a possibility of making some man so angry that his conscience pricked him, I would fall on my knees, and say, "My God, if that man should kill me, if it will be the means of saving his own soul, let him do it. If an honest warning should so stir up his wrath, then even so let it be; only grant, my Father, that the end may be served in letting him know the folly and the evil which were leading him astray."

Brethren and sisters, let every one of us retire to our closets, and examine ourselves. Put your hopes in the crucible; see whether they will stand the test of the Word of the Lord, which is like a fire. Judge yourself as you would judge another. If you are acquainted with another man who, you know, is living in the commission of a sin which makes his profession a falsehood, and you also are living in that sin, do not think any better of yourself than you think of him. If you knew a man, whose limb was rotting with mortification, would you not urge him to have it cut off? Well, then, have your own cut off. If you saw a man who was rushing swiftly to perdition, would you not start off boldly, and warn him? Then, be as bold with yourself as you would be with others. Talk to your own self as you would talk to other people. If you would observe this rule, I should not be afraid of what will happen to you; and some of you will thank God that you were ever led to examine yourselves, for now, as guilty sinners, you can flee to the cross of Christ, and by faith lay hold of him who is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE XIV. 25—35.

Verse 25. *And there went great multitudes with him:*

During at least a part of his earthly ministry, Christ was very popular. The people crowded to his feet, and they were willing to make him a king; but you must have observed that he was always faithful in speaking to the populace, he did not flatter them. He dealt in the same fashion also with those who professed to be his followers. He winnowed the heap that was laid upon the floor, and drove away the chaff from the midst of the wheat.

25, 26. *And he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*

Do not misunderstand this passage. Our Lord does not use the word "hate" in our common acceptation of the term, for no man would hate his own life; but he means that the love of all these must be secondary to the love we bear to him. Compared with our love to our Lord, all lower love must be more like hate. We must be willing to give up everything—to give up even ourselves—our entire selves—to him, for Christ will have all or nothing. He will never divide the human heart with any rival. If we profess to serve him, we must have him for our only Master, and not attempt to serve two masters. I fear that this truth greatly needs to be enforced nowadays, for we have numbers of so-called Christians, who are worldlings first, and then Christians afterwards. We have a great many professors who might be accurately described by the words of a little girl concerning her father. When someone asked her, "Is your father a Christian?" she replied, "Yes, but he has not worked much at it lately." There are plenty of that sort. Christianity is their trade, their business, their profession; but they have not worked much at it lately, they carry it on very slightly indeed. Let it not be so with us; if we would be followers of Christ, our whole hearts must be his.

27. *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*

If there is any cross-bearing involved in Christianity,—such as the cross of holy living, or the cross of believing old-fashioned doctrines, and not being "abreast of the times,"—if there is any sort of cross which is involved in the conscientious discharge of our duty as followers of Christ, we must bear it, or else we cannot be his disciples. Our Lord's words are very clear and explicit: "'And whosoever doth not bear his cross,'—be he who he may, whatever pretensions or professions he may make,—if he does not bear his cross, 'and come after me, cannot be my disciple.'"

28—30. *For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*

Do you not think that there are a great many towers of that kind about in our day? I mean, unfinished Christian characters, persons who profess to be followers of Christ, but are not. They just exhibit to you their own shortcomings; they are people with good intentions, who did make some attempt to follow Jesus; but, since it involved too much self-denial, they were not able to go that length, so they turned back, and walked no more with him. They began to build a tower, but never finished it. May God, in his mercy, prevent you and me becoming a laughing-stock to all eternity! I believe that, in the last great day, and for ever, those persons, who knew enough about the gospel to wish to be Christians, and who

were somewhat actuated by right motives, but yet who never went so far as to give up their hearts to Christ, will stand forth as monuments of their own folly, and even the demons in hell will point at them, and say, "These men began to build, and were not able to finish." Such persons will be unable to answer that contemptuous sneer. If you have conscience enough to begin to follow Christ, even reason itself requires you to go the whole length. If you know that it is right for you to do so, why do you not go through with it? If you are sufficiently convinced of its rightness to go as far as you do, why not go still farther? God grant that you may! Better never begin to build than to commence without having counted the cost, and then to find that you have not sufficient to finish.

31, 32. *Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.*

If you cannot fight the world, the flesh, and the devil,—if there is no power that can help you to do it, or if you are not willing to be helped by the only power that can help you,—if you will not surrender yourself to Christ that he may baffle all the hosts of the adversary, then it is of no use for you to begin the war.

33. *So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

In Christ's days, and afterwards, discipleship usually involved the absolute giving up of everything that his followers had, for those were times of persecution; and if such seasons should come to us, we must have such love to Christ that, for his sake, we could forsake all that we have; otherwise we cannot be his disciples.

34. *Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?*

Christianity is good; but if the very life has gone out of it, what can you do with it? A dead professor is the most corrupt thing under heaven. Some there are who think that God's salt can lose its savour, and yet get it back again. I remember one who told me that he knew a person who had been born again four times. That doctrine of re-re-re-regeneration is one that I have never found in the Word of God. I believe that true regeneration never fails to take effect, and that it never loses that effect. It begets within the soul a life that cannot die; but, if that life could die, it could never be brought back again. The apostle Paul puts this matter beyond dispute in Hebrews vi. 4—6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

35. *It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out.*

A dead profession of religion is utterly useless; and if it could be possible that a man should be really quickened by the Spirit of God, and yet that the new life should depart from him, he would be in a hopeless case indeed.

35. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

Let all of us give good heed to this injunction, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TOO GOOD TO BE SAVED!

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 12TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, July 17th, 1881.

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."—Luke xviii. 14.

THE publican was justified rather than the Pharisee; the outwardly worse man of the two was accepted rather than the one who was apparently better: "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Observe, dear friends, our Saviour's gentle way of describing the contrast between these two men. He says that the publican was "justified rather than the other;" but we all know that, behind this mild and lenient expression, there is the sad and solemn truth that the Pharisee was not justified at all. It is concerning that fact that I am about to speak to you. The publican was justified, and the Pharisee was not; yet our Lord only said, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." It will be true wisdom, on our part also, to sometimes state a truth in the very mildest way possible. A Scriptural doctrine loses nothing of its effect by being tenderly expressed; indeed, a forcible truth may even have its force increased by being rather understated than overstated. Our Lord Jesus Christ knew when to use this holy art, and he did so on this occasion; and, therefore, you and I will be wise if we do the same when a fitting opportunity occurs.

Notice, further, dear friends, that the pith, the marrow, the very centre of the blessing that we expect to get in worship is justification. To be accepted of God, to be regarded as just, to be esteemed by him as doing the right thing,—this is what we ought to seek whenever we come together for worship; and in that sense the publican, with his earnest cry for mercy, was justified; that is, he was accepted by God, he was regarded as one who had been made just, while the Pharisee, who stood there ostentatiously publishing his own excellences, was not justified, was not accepted, was not considered a just man, and did not receive from God any of the favours which he is accustomed to give to those who rightly worship him in spirit and in truth.

The reason why the Pharisee did not receive that which is the end of all worship—namely, acceptance with God, and justification in his sight,—was that he reckoned himself too good to be justified; according to his own opinion, he was altogether too righteous a man to need God's favour and mercy. And I want now to speak to any of you who think you are too good to be saved. I am always preaching to sinners, and I have had the great delight of seeing many and many a sinner taken in the gospel net, and saved. Now I want to talk to those who are scarcely sinners except that, by way of compliment, they acknowledge that they are sinners. "Yes," they say, "we are all sinners;" and if they go to church, they say, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners;" yet, all the while, they neither look miserable, nor are they really conscious that they are sinners in the sight of God, and already under condemnation. I want to speak specially to this class of persons. It is a great pity that it should be so, yet there are many people who, in their own estimation, are much too good to be saved, too good ever to be justified, too good ever to go to heaven. There may be some such persons here; if so, may God the Holy Spirit bless to them what I have to say to them in Christ's name!

I. My first remark is that THERE STILL ARE SUCH PERSONS AS THIS PHARISEE.

There are still in the world many persons who, in their own opinion, are too good to be justified, too good to be saved; and they come to this condition *because they compare themselves with others.* This Pharisee said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." He felt himself to be quite a saint compared with the publican; he went up many degrees in his own estimation when he thought of what a wicked extortioner that publican had been; and he remembered someone who had been an adulterer, and another person who had been unjust, and contrasting himself with these people, he felt that he was the most respectable individual whom he knew, a man to be held in very high esteem. He felt that God ought to be thanked for making such a man; and if nobody else would do it, he would do it himself, for that was a duty which ought to be discharged at once. So remarkable a specimen of human excellence ought not to be left on the face of the earth, ungratefully forgotten by men; and as many of them did seem to forget him, and not to see his excellences, he would himself bless God that there was, at any rate, one person in the world who was all he ought to be, if not a little more. He reckoned himself to be so good because he compared himself with other men.

My dear hearer, are you very good by the same sort of measurement? Are you superlatively excellent because you judge yourself by a similar standard? If so, let me ask you kindly to make use of that standard in another way by comparing yourself, not with those whom you regard as your inferiors, but with those whom you must own to be your superiors. You have surely read some biographies of really devout, earnest, holy, consecrated men, whose lives much exceed yours in all that is of true worth; so, if you will look up

instead of looking down, I think you will soon begin to say, "Ah! I am far short of their standard; I am nothing like those men were. I am not living such a careful, prayerful, watchful, self-denying, consecrated life as they lived." Let this thought take a little of the conceit out of you. Begin to think that you are not quite so good as you thought you were, and it may do you some service, if you meditate for a while upon that fact. "But," you say, "we cannot all be expected to come up to their standard." Ah! but you are expected to do that, and a great deal more; for, if you are going to be justified by your works, you will have to go far above their standard. The true standard by which you are to measure yourself is not even the most saintly of the saints, nor the most devoted of the martyrs and confessors. The standard for any man who would be saved by his own righteousness is God's holy law. Listen to it: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Have you come anywhere near that standard? I am sure you have not; you have fallen far short of what God demands of you, so what does it matter though you say, "I am better than some people are"? You are evidently worse than others are, and you are much worse—infinitely worse—than you ought to be; and the perfect law of God, if you are to be justified by it, requires a perfect obedience to all its commands, and that you can never render. O dear sirs, you are labouring under a terrible mistake; you are, in your own judgment, superlatively good, but you come to that conclusion only by comparing yourselves among yourselves, a process which, as the apostle Paul tells us, is "not wise." Measure yourselves by the law of God, and you will shrink into nothing at once if you are a man of honour, and wisdom, and sense.

There are some who think themselves much too good to be justified by God, and they are under that delusion *because they have set one duty above another.* Listen to this Pharisee's boast: "I fast twice in the week." Among the Pharisees of our Lord's day, I believe that Monday and Thursday were the regular fast days; I have heard that, among certain modern Pharisees, Friday is the appointed time for fasting, but that is a matter about which I do not know much. The Pharisee evidently felt that it was a most important thing to fast twice in the week, and then he added, "I give tithes of all that I possess." There were certain tithes that were demanded by God's law, but he seems to imply that he did more than was required of him, for he gave tithes of all that he had coming in. I daresay that, like the rest of the Pharisees, he had tithed the "mint, and anise, and cummin;" probably, altogether, it did not amount to much, and in comparison with "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith," which he had omitted, it was as nothing at all; but he was very careful to pay the tithe of his mint, and anise, and cummin. That might have been to his credit if he had not set it up as being the chief and main thing, to be put in the front, the choice article to be exhibited in the window, to let everybody see what a remarkably excellent person he was: "I

fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." He did not say anything about the widows' houses that he had devoured, nor about the pretence and hypocrisy that lurked behind his long prayers; he did not say anything about his pride, and his contempt for his fellow-men, which he even dared to express in what he called his prayers. No; but he brought certain other things to the front, out of all true proportion, and then he felt himself to be wonderfully good.

Well, now, we know some persons who are most regular in their attendance at a place of worship. Perhaps someone asks, "Is not that a good thing for me to do?" Yes, it is an excellent thing; but I do not say much about it if you give short weight in your shop, or if you tell lies in your home, or anywhere else, or if you are living an unchaste life. There are other things to be thought of besides going to meeting on Sunday. "Oh! but we have been baptized, and we take the communion." Yes, I know you do; and it is a very important thing that you should do so if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you are really living as true believers should live. But if you put any religious ceremony to the front, and omit the more vital matters, it will not do.

Then you know there are some persons who say, "Well, sir, I was baptized as an infant, I was confirmed by the bishop, I have always attended the parish church; I give my guinea to every contribution, I have family prayer, I have—I hardly like to say how many good things I have." Just so; that is the way with some people, they put a certain set of duties into the front, while other duties are neglected; and they bring to God one duty blood-red with the murder of another. There are some who have given to God what they have gained by lying and trickery in their business, or they have given to God what they have ground out of the bones and marrow of the poor. Is it not often so? But it is not to be expected that God will accept either ourselves or our offerings because we choose to put one set of external duties into the front, and then say, "We are superlatively good." It is a dreadful delusion; may God save you from it, my friend, if you are under it! Remember the solemn words of the Lord Jesus upon this very point: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

There are also some persons who reckon themselves to be very good *because they conceive themselves to have done almost more than they ought.* There is one family of the "Good-enoughs" and there is another family of the "Too-goods." They are cousins, I believe; certainly, they are very closely related. This Pharisee belonged to the family of the "Too-goods." I have already reminded you that he said, "I fast twice in the week." Now, according to the law of the Jews, they were to fast once in the year; so this man gave a hundred days for one, for he fasted twice in the week. They were to give a tithe of the produce of their land; but he did more than that. He said, "'I give tithes of all that I possess;' surely, there is a balance to my credit. If I do fall short anywhere, I have gone over the mark in some other things, and have done more than was required of me." Alas! it is often the characteristic of hypocrites

that they overdo one part and underdo another. Remember that striking simile in Hosea vii. 8: "Ephraim is a cake not turned." What happens to a cake that is not turned? Why, it is done too much on one side, and it is not done on the other. It is burnt black upon the coals on one side, and the other side is dough just as it was when it was put down to bake. How many there are who keep always looking at their burnt side! "Oh!" they cry, "we are baked, and more than baked." Yes, but look at the other side of you, which God also sees; there, you are underdone. Oh, that we might have sense enough to look at ourselves in a true light, and to see the whole of ourselves; for then our foolish self-righteousness would soon vanish!

Let me speak to these very good people a little longer. This Pharisee, though he was so very good in his own esteem, could not be justified, *because he did not pray.* Someone asks, perhaps, "Did he not pray?" No; he went up to the temple to pray, but he did not pray. There was not a word of prayer in all that he said. And you, my friend, may have knelt down every morning and every evening since you were a child, and yet never have prayed, for prayer is the speaking of a poverty-stricken heart to a rich God,—the actual asking of something from God,—but you have not felt that you needed anything from him, so you have not asked for it. You have never cried out of your heart unto the Lord; you have uttered a certain form of words, and that has been the end of it. You may say your prayers every day till you die, and yet never have prayed at all. How could this Pharisee expect that he should be saved when he had never prayed?

And, next, *he did not love his fellow-men;* and it is a rule with God that, if we love not our fellows, we shall not have his love. If we forgive not our erring brother, neither will the Lord forgive us. This Pharisee did not love his brother; he put all the rest of mankind into one bundle, and he said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men,"—the whole lot of them. He himself stood there alone; he was the one man for whom God was to be thanked. He did not love his fellows, or else he would have thought better of them, and he would not have put them all down as unworthy to be associated with himself, nor would he have set himself up above them all. Specially, he did not love that publican; he was horrified to find him standing so near him, and he uttered, even in the house of God, a contemptuous expression concerning his fellow-sinner. How could God send a man home justified when he was unloving, and without sympathy for his fellow-man?

Notice, also, that *this Pharisee did not ask for mercy.* Look again at his pretended prayer; there is not anything in it concerning mercy. He said, "God, I thank thee;" but he did not cry, "Give me mercy; grant me forgiveness; pardon all my transgressions against thee." There was not a word of petition or supplication; then how should God give the man that which he never asked for? How should he bestow justification on one who never sought it?

Perhaps the most fatal flaw of all was that *there was no reference to an atonement in his devotion.* He said, "God, I thank thee, that

I am not as other men are;" but there was no plea that the atonement offered on the altar might avail for him. Yet, deep down in the poor publican's prayer, there lies an allusion to the propitiation or mercy-seat. The penitent cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," has in it the veiled thought of the great propitiatory sacrifice; but how shall God hear the prayer of the man who does not plead the blood of Jesus, nor make any mention of his great sacrifice for sin? The Pharisee was too good altogether in his own esteem, so he was not justified; I wonder whether there are any such people here.

II. Secondly, and but briefly, let me say, concerning such persons as this Pharisee, that THEY CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED.

I can support my statement by the following reasons. First, *for God to justify them, would be to dishonour himself by putting himself in the place of a debtor to them*, and that can never be the case. This man as good as pleaded, if he pleaded at all, that God should accept and justify him because he had not done certain things, and he had done other things; therefore God was, as it were, indebted to him for his extraordinary excellence. But man, woman, dost thou think that God will ever be debtor to thee? Wilt thou dare to stand before thy Maker, and talk to him as if thou hadst some merits of thine own which deserved commendation from him? Probably you would not say that in so many words; but there are many who are practically saying as much as that. They kick against the doctrine of election, for instance. They say that, for God to save one person, and not another, is wrong, for they have as much claim upon him as others have, which is true, for they have no claim at all, just as others have none at all. Yet their very opposition to God's exercise of his sovereign rights proves that, deep down in their hearts, they believe they have some claim upon him, and that God is in some sense their debtor. But, dear friends, you can never be justified while you talk or act in such a way as that. God will freely give heaven itself away, he will give his own Son as the free gift of his grace, but he will have no dealings with you if you think you have any claims upon him. Claims upon him? Wretches, who deserved long ago to have been cast into hell, how can you talk about your own merits when you appear before the infinitely-holy God?

Further, God cannot justify these self-righteous people *because, if he did, it would be as good as saying that Christ's atonement was needless.* If you can go to heaven by your own works, why did Christ die? If you can get there by fasting, and prayer, and by religious observances, and moralities, then yonder cross with Christ upon it was a superfluity and a mistake. There was no need for any plan of salvation, and no need of an atonement by blood, if, after all, men might be good enough to save themselves. But we know that there is no salvation apart from Christ's atoning sacrifice; so God cannot justify the self-righteous when, in order to do so, he would have to cast a slur upon his own wisdom, and upon his own well-beloved Son. You good people, you who are too good to be saved,—I mean, too good in your own esteem,—you cannot be justified.

Further, if God were to justify those who are like this Pharisee was, he would be *either making two ways to heaven, or else shutting sinners out.* You see, dear friends, God must shut the sinners out if the door into heaven is only for the good, or else he must make a special entrance for the gentlefolk, a little private door where qualified people can go in by presenting tickets describing their own merits. But, if that were to be the case, we should have to get the Bible altered, for this blessed Book tells us that there is only one way of salvation, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself says that he is the way. The Bible says that there is only one foundation, and that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The apostle Peter, speaking to the rulers and elders of Israel, said, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Suppose that sinners are to be saved partly by works and partly by grace, then what is to become of those who have no good works to plead? Shall they be lost? No; yet, if they are to be saved, they must be saved by grace alone. Then there must be two ways to save men; some by grace,—that is the way for sinners; some by grace and works,—that is the way for respectable people like some of you. Then we should have two gates to heaven; and if two, why not twenty? And then, at last, it would come to this, that we might have twenty thousand different ways to heaven. I have seen a book entitled "Every man's own lawyer," and we might in time have another book upon the subject, "Every man his own saviour." That is what it would practically come to at last if there was more than one way of salvation. But it is not so, and never shall be so. There is one way of salvation for all who come to God, and that is by faith in Jesus Christ; and if you will not walk in this narrow way, if you are too good to travel along this pilgrim path, you shall perish in your accursed self-righteousness. Accursed indeed it is, for it has shut multitudes out of all hope of mercy, because they have thought themselves too good to be saved.

If the self-righteous are to be saved, we must alter the Bible in other places besides those I have quoted. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." You must strike that passage out, and so you must the reference to "him that justifieth the ungodly." It must no longer be said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;" but we shall have to make David say, "Blessed is he who has never sinned at all, but whose merits deserve eternal life." Poor David himself would have come off badly under such a rule.

You will also have to alter the church as well as the Bible. I must go out, and most of my brethren and sisters will have to go out, for we shall not be able to get along with such good people as you are. We have all been sinners, and God has had mercy upon us, and we love him much because he has forgiven us much; and when you self-righteous folk come in, you will not like to associate with

us; and when we pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner," you will feel ashamed of us. Yet, mark you, the church will not be altered in order to please you.

If it were, we should also have to alter many of our best hymns. We could not sing the hymns we have sung this evening. "Rock of Ages" also would have to go, for we should feel that Toplady made a mistake when he wrote it; and "Jesu, Lover of my soul," would have to follow it. If this is the right system, if the good people are to come to Christ with their own goodness, and to be saved because they are so good, then what is to become of the whole of our hymn-book? Why, everything will be turned upside down; but mark this, the turning upside down will come in another way. It is you self-righteous ones who will be turned upside down; and if you will continue to be deluded, and to believe a lie, you will have to suffer for it. I pray that God, in his mercy, may abase you now with true humility, and lay you low at the feet of Jesus; for, if not, you will have to be abased at the coming of the Lord, in the day when he shall judge all things according to infallible truth; and your fancied righteousness will then melt away like hoar-frost at the rising of the sun, and you will cry out in despair, "Woe is me! Woe is me! I did think myself good and excellent; but now I am cast out, while sinners, whom I despised, are brought in to feast on his wondrous mercy for evermore."

III. Now I shall conclude by observing, concerning these people who are, in their own esteem, too good to be justified by grace, and who do not therefore seek God's grace, that IT IS MOST FITTING THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED.

I will tell you why it is most fitting; and, first, *because it is taking them on their own standing.* A man ought never to object to be taken at his own valuation. I had an experience once which may illustrate the way in which God will deal with men who are like this Pharisee. There came to me a gentleman,—a very great gentleman,—who wished to become a student of the College. He told me that, in all probability, I had never had such a remarkable genius as he was offering himself as a student. Of course, I was amazed, and deeply gratified. I asked him in what way he could display his genius, and he replied that he had been studying for the ministry for many years, that he was most fluent and eloquent, and that, if I liked, he would preach me a sermon on the spot upon any subject that I chose to give him. I said, "No; I do not think that I could listen to a sermon from you just now, for I have a good many other people waiting to see me." He went on to tell me about his wonderful attainments, but I stopped him, and said, "I must decline your application." "But why?" he asked. "Well," I answered, "we have no such men as you are in the College; we have none of your sort." "Well, then," he said, "it is time you had." So I told him that the tutors were very ordinary sort of persons; and, according to his own account, he knew very much more than they did, to begin with; and I also said that the President of the College was a still more ordinary person, and that, considering the way in which I was confounded by his dazzling genius

in that short conversation, I really must decline him. It was not possible that we should be able to get on together, for there was nothing that he could learn, as he knew everything already, so there was no need for him to become a student with us.

You may imagine his surprise because I took him on his own footing. He showed himself off to be such a remarkably wonderful man that all I could feel was, "I can read you through and through, and understand what a fool you are." I did not tell him so, but I met him on his own ground, and told him that he was much too good for me to receive into the College. I believe it was right that he should be so answered, for Solomon said, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." And, oh, how grimly and solemnly will God, at the last, answer every self-righteous fool according to his folly:—"You say that you did not sin as that publican did. No; and, therefore, you did not repent as that publican did. Christ came into the world to save sinners; but, according to your own declaration, you are not one of them, so he did not come to save you. He has shed his blood to wash the filthy; but you say that you are not filthy, so you shall never be washed, you shall for ever remain as you are." This will be one way of letting the self-righteous see how God doth laugh at the calamity of those who have despised his mercy, and doth mock when their fear cometh. All their self-righteousness was a mocking and a laughing at Christ, and his precious blood, and at free grace and the gospel; so the time will come when they will hear another kind of laugh, and it will be but fitting that they should.

It is fitting that the self-righteous should not be justified, and they themselves cannot wonder at it, because *they know that they are unwilling to accept the gospel.* They cannot wonder that they do not have its blessings, for they do not like its terms. There are some of you, I fear, who are not willing to make a confession of your sin; you say that you do not wish to be saved by charity, to be delivered from going down to the pit by the sovereign, unmerited grace of God; you must have a hand in the matter somehow, for you have some claim upon God, you think. Well, then, do you wonder that what you will not receive is denied to you? They who shut their eyes must not marvel if the sun seems no more to shine for them. When men will not hear, they must not be surprised if the voice ceases to speak. Take heed unto yourselves, ye who are trusting in your own righteousness, lest God, taking you at your word, and seeing you unwilling to accept the blood and righteousness of Christ, may justly give you over to perish in your sin.

What an awful sight that will be,—*a man everlastingly a martyr to his own pride!* Even the demons in hell might ask, "Why did that man come to hell? Was he unjust?" No. "Was he an extortioner?" No. "Was he an adulterer?" No. "Then, why did he come here?" Because he would not go to heaven by grace. He thanked God that he was not as other men are; but he has not much to thank God for now, for he finds himself cast out while many of the other men, whom he despised, are saved. "But why did he go to hell?" Only to keep up his own pride, to have his own

way, and not to bow his neck to Christ's righteous rule. When a man sacrifices his life for his country, when a man loses his life on behalf of science,—above all, when a man is burned to death for God and for the truth, I can honour him; but when a man loses his soul for the sake of his pride, angels and men may well cover him with everlasting contempt. O sirs, I pray you, if pride is keeping you out of heaven, give it up, and cast yourselves down at Jesu's feet! The old fable tells us of a fox that entered into a vineyard by a very small hole. He was very thin then, but he ate so many of the grapes that he grew to be twice his former size, and could not get out again; and there he would have been caught and killed. He had grown too big to make his escape, so there was nothing for him to do but just to starve himself down to his former size, and so get out to a place of safety. And if you have made yourselves so big with your own righteousness that you cannot get through that strait and narrow way of yielding to Christ, and trusting him, and obeying him, then you must shrink and starve yourself down to this size. I pray God speedily to bring you down to it till you, too, shall be a bankrupt sinner, an emptied sinner, a condemned sinner, and then shall just look to Christ upon the cross, and live, for—

> "There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
> There is life at this moment for thee,"—

if thou wilt but look there for it. But if thou wilt look only to thyself for it, thou wilt perish in thine iniquity, and thy blood will be upon thine own head. God bless this word to all whom it concerns, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE XVIII. 1—14.

Verse 1. *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

"Not to faint" in their expectation of answers to their supplications, and therefore give up prayer; but to persevere in presenting their petitions at the throne of grace, because prayer is never lost labour. There may be a time during which God does not appear to answer prayer, but he will ultimately answer it; therefore, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" in prayer. If they do not pray, they will faint in many ways. Their courage will faint. All their hope as to the future will faint, and fall into a dead swoon as it were. So, dear friends, you have your choice between praying and fainting. The doctrine our Saviour laid down was "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" and this is the parable which he related in illustration of that truth:—

2. *Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

He was a most unfit person to be a judge, as many in Eastern cities still are. They are ready enough to take bribes, but they are not so prompt in giving just judgments. They generally attend to the business of the rich and the powerful, but neglect the poor and needy. So was it with this judge, who "feared not God, neither regarded man."

3. *And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

Probably someone had come, and taken away from her the little bit of land that her husband had left her, upon the produce of which she and the children might have lived; and she could not get it back again. So she comes to the judge, and cries, "Avenge me of mine adversary."

4. *And he would not for a while:—*

He had plenty of applicants who could pay him better than this poor woman could, so he disregarded her petition; but he little knew that, in her, he had to deal with a woman who meant to be heard, and who intended to press her suit until she won it. She was evidently a very determined character. Though a broken-hearted widow, yet she was not broken-spirited even though the judge refused for a while to attend to her plea.

4, 5. *But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

She came again, and again, and again, and again; she would not leave off coming, for she meant to have the justice she sought, and she did get it. Now that is the way to pray, as if we would even weary God with our supplications, though we never can do so. It is impossible to weary him with earnest believing entreaties, yet we must show the same determination in prayer which this importunate widow manifested while pleading with the unjust judge.

6. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.*

He is unjust, but he is obliged to be just now. He is hard-hearted, but he is compelled to yield. The widow has conquered him, not by her money, but by her importunity. She is there so often that she troubles him, and he says he must give in, and grant her request.

7. *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

He may seem to be slow about it; but when his people cry to him, he will hear them ultimately if he does not at once. Do not imagine that the children of God will always be laughed at, and downtrodden. God will yet arise, and take their side. They may be pushed into a corner for a while, but they shall come out into a large room in due season, for God will certainly avenge his own elect.

8. *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

If anybody could find it, he would, for he creates it all, and he knows where to look for it; yet there is so little of it that even he, whose eyes can detect the faith that is as small as a grain of mustard seed, can scarcely find it. There is all too little real faith in the world; and those who think they have most of it, when they get into troubled waters, soon find they have not any to spare, and much that they thought was faith does not turn out to be so. O men, brethren, fathers, how little do we trust our God compared with what he deserves!

9, 10. *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray;*

They were both alike in going up to the temple, but they were very different in coming back from the temple. It is a very important thing to come to the house of God in a right state of heart; and it is a still better thing to go away from the Lord's house really benefited and improved. These two men went up to the temple with the same object; each of them

went there "to pray." Both intended to pray, though they did not both do so; yet that was their ostensible object.

10. *The one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

A tax-gatherer, one of the most hated people in Christ's day, because none but the lowest class of Jews would collect taxes for the Romans; and, as a general rule, they farmed the taxes, and greatly increased them by demanding of the people much more than was due. They were therefore held in the worst possible repute. I am not sure that tax-gatherers are the objects of much love anywhere; but, among the Jews, they were detested because they were collecting tribute for the Romans whom the conquered nation abhorred.

11. *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

So it is evident that he noticed one person who was there, though I do not find that the publican took any notice of him. We can tell by this remark that the mind of the Pharisee was wandering from his supposed devotions. It is a bad sign in a so-called worshipper when he knows a great deal about other people who are in the Lord's house. I have known many people, whose recollection, after a sermon, has been quite as much about who was there, and who was not there, as it has been about what was in the sermon, and what was not in it. So this Pharisee's eyes went gadding about, and he spied out the poor publican; but, after a contemptuous reference to him, he returned to the catalogue of his own virtues and excellences:—

12. *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

There his prayer ended, and he stood in a most enviable state of contentment, delighted with himself, lost in the contemplation of his own ineffable purity. I think I see him in all his glory, yet I quickly turn to the other part of the temple, further away from the most sacred place, for there I behold the true worshipper.

13. *And the publican, standing afar off,—*

Not afar off from the Pharisee only, but afar off from the sacred shrine, the innermost temple, as if unworthy to be there at all: "the publican, standing afar off,"—

13. *Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven,—*

That throne of the Highest,—as if even a glance from his unholy eyes might defile that sacred place. He bowed his eyes downward, as if to read in the earth the record of his sin; he did not dare to look up;—

13. *But smote upon his breast,—*

His heart smote him, and he smote upon his heart,—

13, 14. *Saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

The great Lord and Master acts as he would have his true servants do. It was said of some of them that they turned the world upside down, and that is exactly what he does. He abases those who exalt themselves, and he exalts those who abase themselves; he lifts up the lowly, and casts down them of high degree in their own estimation; and so shall it be to the end of the world.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—397, 544.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"GOOD JUDGMENT."

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 19TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, July 21st, 1881.

"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments."—Psalm cxix. 65, 66.

WHEN the psalmist wrote these words, he was contemplating the goodness of God. In the verse preceding our text, the 64th, he sang, "The earth, O Jehovah, is full of thy mercy!" as if he could not walk abroad without seeing evidences of it, or look upward, or backward, or around him, without everywhere perceiving the omnipresent goodness of the Most High. Whatever season of the year it is in which we take our walks abroad into the field of nature, we ought to be in such a condition of mind and heart as to see proofs of the fulness of God's love everywhere around us; but especially, methinks, it should be so in these summer months when the fields are ripening toward the harvest, and we see how God is fulfilling his ancient covenant, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." How thankful we ought to be that the Lord thus remembers the earth, and makes it bring forth the corn, and everything else that is needful to supply the wants of men! So let us bless God that the earth is still full of his mercy.

Is our own life in the same condition, or are we strangers to the goodness of God? Is there mercy all around us, yet none for us? Well, let others answer these questions as they may, there are many, here present, who can reply most emphatically, "No; the earth is full of God's mercy; and we can each one of us say to him, 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord.' Though thou hast had so many others of thy creatures to care for, thou hast not forgotten poor me. Though I am but the merest atom, dwelling in a world which is itself nothing more than a speck when compared with the innumerable worlds that throng thy universe, yet thou hast not failed to let thy mercy come to me, even to me."

I have sometimes lighted upon a little flower right in the depths of the forest glades. It seemed as if it were hidden quite away, utterly concealed by the umbrageous trees; and yet it bloomed as sweetly as if it had been watched over and cared for by the utmost skill; for somewhere between the boughs,—I could not tell where, —there was a little window through which the sun shone into the heart of that tiny flower, kissing it into perfume, and tinging it with those lovely colours which made it so attractive. All around it, the soil was bare, but this sweet flower flourished all by itself; and so, brethren, if you have lived in the midst of those who have forgotten your God, you have been hidden away in obscurity, yet the Lord has not forgotten you; and, somehow,—ay, and continually,—the beams of his gracious sunlight have come even to you, and you must bless and praise and magnify him to whom you owe all that you have and are. Therefore cheerfully bear witness with the rest of God's people to this blessed fact, and join with the psalmist in saying, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy Word." You may go further, and say, "Thou hast dealt well with all thy servants, O Lord, according unto thy Word." David had not always thought so; but he did think so when he came to sum up the total of his life's experience, and to write it down in his pocket-book,—for I suppose that the 119th Psalm was made up of the entries in David's diary as he went along. This was the summary of all that he had experienced, that God had dealt well with him; but as he had not always thought so, he felt that he had been very much misled and mistaken in judgment, and hence he prayed this prayer: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments."

There will be three things for me to talk about to-night. First, *judgment expressed.* David expressed his judgment as to how God had dealt with him, and very sound and judicious judgment it was: "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy Word." Secondly, I shall have to speak to you about *judgment desired:* "Teach me good judgment and knowledge;" and, thirdly, I shall tell you about *judgment possessed.* The psalmist did already possess a measure of good judgment; he was not altogether left to be as the foolish, for he could truthfully say to the Lord, "I have believed thy commandments." He had possessed judgment enough for that, and that is one reason why he might expect to have more, for it is an old law of God's kingdom, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

I. First, then, here is David's JUDGMENT EXPRESSED: "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord."

Looking through his past life, he came to the conclusion, first, that *God had dealt with him.* It is a very awe-inspiring truth, and one that should make us feel that this life is a solemn thing, because in it God deals with us. We thought that we had been having dealings with our fellow-men, and so we have; but, all the while, there has been another who has also been dealing with us; and we say, "Under all, and over all, and within all, have been

the dealings of his providence;" or, rather, let us say, "the dealings of God himself," so that we can personally say, "Thou hast dealt with thy servant." It will not be wonderful if we add, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Surely the Lord is in this place."

There are some who cannot or who will not see that God deals with men in this mortal life. Alas, for them! God is the very life of life; and there are some of us who could not be made to think otherwise than that God has dealt with us, for there have been portions of our life which have been so surprising that, whenever we look back upon them, they amaze us. There is no novel that ever was written that can equal in interest the true life of a believing man. His path is strewn with wonders, and thick with marvellous displays of his Lord's love. I will not refer specially to any man's life; if I did, it would have to be the one I know best, that is, my own. Each man must speak according to his own experience, and I am compelled to say, and to say it without the slightest hesitation, "The Lord has dealt with my soul." As surely as I live, I have spoken with him, and he has spoken with me. Nay, more than that, he has dealt out innumerable mercies to me, and constantly dealt with me, and through me he has dealt with many others also; and this I know, that life would not be worth living if it did not continually touch the hem of Jehovah's garments. The very virtue of life streams into our life through our being in contact with him. Where the little circle of our existence impinges upon the unutterably vast circumference of his power and glory, is where we get the blessings that we need.

I wish that we recognized far more clearly than we do that God is round about us at all times. In the olden days, the saints often met with God,—sometimes beneath a tree, or beside a bush, or in a lone desert, or outside a city wall, or by a brook at midnight, or in a furnace all a-glow; they met him in all manner of places, for he was much about in those good old days, or else there were men about then who were quick to record his manifestations to his people. But have not we also beheld his face again and again? Have not we often had communion with the Well-beloved? Has he not had dealings with us also? Surely the beams and timbers of this house of prayer would cry out against us if we did not say, "Verily, the Lord hath been mindful of us, and he hath manifested himself unto us as he doth not unto the world. Truly, God hath dealt with us."

This is also true of every man, though not in the same sense, nor to the same extent. God has dealt with you all. Into whatever position you have been cast, God has had some dealings with you. Take heed lest, his dealings of longsuffering being slighted, he should begin to deal with you after another fashion, for he has a rod of iron, and woe be to the potter's vessels in the day when he begins to dash them in pieces! Oh, that he might deal with us only in mercy, and never come to deal with us in wrath, as he will have to do with the men who go on in their iniquities! That is the first judgment of David, that God had dealt with him.

But he also judged that *God had dealt well with him:* "Thou hast

dealt well with thy servant, O Lord;" and this, too, is our judgment. Taking God's dealings as a whole, he has dealt well with us. There are some points, in his dealings with us, which have been so special that the words of our text hardly appear emphatic enough to describe them. For instance, when I think of God's purposes concerning us from before the foundation of the world, it scarcely seems sufficient to say, "The Lord hath dealt well with us." When I remember the covenant, that "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure," I want to say something much stronger than that God hath dealt well with us; I prefer to say that he has dealt with us like a God, in a divine way, for which there is no earthly comparison. Then, when he gave his Son to bleed and die for us, and when he sent his Spirit to convert us, and then to dwell in us, it is not enough if I say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servants." It is better than well; it is indescribably, unutterably well that God has dealt with us in the way of free, rich, sovereign, immutable, everlasting love,—glory be to his holy name!

But take our personal experience, for I suppose the psalmist is here referring to that. How well the Lord has dealt with us in providence! Adding up all our varied experiences, we can truly say that all things have worked together for our good. Life has been a strange mixture for some of us; our coat of arms might be the chequers, black and white, for we have had sweets and bitters intermingled, bitter sweets and sweet bitters. What strange compounds many of our lives are! The evening and the morning have made the day from the creation; and we have had darkness and brightness; but, putting the whole together, the result has been more than well. If we had been the steerers of our own ship, we could not have steered it better than God has done; nay, we could not have guided it anything like as well as he has done. We should have been sure to make a spiritual shipwreck long ago if we had been our own pilots. We should have been bankrupts before now if we had been our own managers; but God has managed our affairs so successfully that, looking upon the whole of them at this moment, we can truly say that God hath dealt well with us.

I may go much further than that, and say that if we were to take to pieces the whole of God's dealings with us, there is not one fragment out of it all of which we should not have to say that God has dealt well with us in it. This is especially true of those parts of his dealings with us which have seemed to be the roughest. Oh, how we ought to bless God for the use he has made of the rod! Among all the blessings of the covenant, surely there is none that, for our present imperfect state, has in it greater immediate virtues than the rod of the covenant from the strokes of which we have not been spared. How grateful we ought to be for sanctified affliction! Wisely did the poet write, concerning the varied experiences of God's children,—

> "'Tis well when on the mount
> They feast on dying love,
> And 'tis as well in God's account,
> When they the furnace prove."

I am sure that, in looking back upon all the way that the Lord hath led you, those of you who are his children will be bound to say that goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life. There has not been a single mistake or one unkind act on God's part. He has cut you sometimes with the very sharpest knife he had, and it was necessary for him to cut deeply with it so as to get out the very roots of the cancer that was destroying you. You would have been lost if it had not been that you lost your all, and that loss was your greatest gain. I have heard of one who said that he never saw till he was blind; and of another who said that he never ran in the way of God's commandments till he lost the use of both his legs. Oftentimes, that which has thrown us down has, in the best sense, lifted us up. So each believer can adopt the language of the text, and say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord." In every place, and at every time, it has been all well right through.

It has also been well in every sense of the word. "Well"—that is to say, wise. "Well"—that is to say, kind, which is something more than being simply wise. "Well"—that is to say, kinder than kind, the kindest of all. What God has done for us has always been the best thing that could be done; it could not have been better. I sometimes fear that, on our part, it could hardly have been worse; shame on us that it was so bad! But, on his part, nothing could possibly have excelled it; every step that he has taken has been full of infinite love and wisdom. And as to the ultimate effects and results of it all, it is well. There will come something better for us out of all that God has prepared for us than has come out of it yet; all is *well*, and all shall be *well*. Pronounce the word with all the emphasis that you can lay upon it, and look at it from all sides, and then say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord."

Now let me shift this kaleidoscope a little, that you may take another peep at all the marvels that it contains. Notice, next, that *God has dealt well with us as his servants:* "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord." Of course, he has dealt well with us as his sons, giving us the child's portion, and the heir's portion. He has dealt well with us as his bride, as the members of his mystical body, and so on; but David said to the Lord, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant;" and I will try to show you how he has dealt well with us as his servants.

First, he has given us blessed work to do. There is no such employment as serving God; this employment is our enjoyment. To serve God is to reign. The Lord has sometimes given us hard service,—so we have thought; but he has always given us proportionate strength, and has never exacted of us more than he has enabled us to accomplish. On another occasion, David wrote, "Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." That is to say, "Thou hast supplied the straw when thou hast expected the bricks to be made. Thou hast given the five talents if thou hast looked for five other talents to be gained as interest on them. Thou hast dealt well in giving little work to those who have had little strength, and less work

when the strength has grown less, and more strength when more work had to be done, and most strength of all when work and suffering came together. Thou hast been very considerate of thy servant's broken bones and many weaknesses. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant in that way."

But servants expect to receive, not only work, but provision; and the Lord has dealt well with his servants in that respect also. He has always kept us in livery; sometimes we may have thought that our raiment was getting pretty well worn out, and that it was time for us to have a change, but it has always come. We have always had food also. God has never kept a stinted table, and we may say of our Heavenly Father's house that there is always bread enough and to spare for all his servants. The Lord has supplied us in providence, and especially in grace; what fat things full of marrow, what wines on the lees well-refined has he prepared for us! God never starves his servants, or puts them on short commons. No; each one of them can truly say to him, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy Word, both in provender and in labour."

And servants like, beside that, to get a word of encouragement now and then from their masters. There was one, who left an excellent master, with whom he had travelled all over the Continent, and when his master asked the reason why he wished to leave him, he answered, "You have not been unkind to me; you have given me all the wages that I wanted; but when I have been with you in the darkest nights, in the heaviest tempests, in the most terrible frosts, you have never spoken a cheering word to me, and I cannot continue to live such a life as that." You know that a kind word or a smiling look will go a long way, and in this respect also we can each one say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord." How graciously he has smiled upon us when we have been trying to serve him! How much he has made of our little! He has often commended us even when we have been blaming ourselves; and when we confessed that we were unprofitable servants, and only spoke the truth when we said so, he has been ready to say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." He has often said to us, "I know thy works," at the very time when we have hardly known them ourselves; or, if we have known them, we have wanted not to recognize them, but to pass them by as if they were unworthy of notice. The Lord has indeed dealt well with his servants in the way of encouragement.

And so he has in respect to our wages. He has given us earnests of the pay which we shall receive at the end of our day's toil. Oh, that blessed pay! How rich we shall be when we receive it, not of debt, but all of grace; a whole heaven, and a whole Christ, and a whole God, for our whole hearts to enjoy throughout the whole of eternity! Was there ever such a "penny" as that paid to labourers at the close of their day's work? But even on the way, the Lord has given us blessed earnests, sweet pledges of what is yet to come to us. We have good cause to love our Master, and to love his work, and to be grateful to him for the pay he gives us for it; and again

each one of us can say to him, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord." Is there any one of his servants here who will not say this? I always think that God has dealt well with me in not turning me out of doors, and I still pray the prayer,—

"Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,"—

for I count it my highest honour to be permitted to do anything for him. He might well say to any of us, "You are not worth your salt," and send us adrift; but he has not done so, and still we can say to him, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, and permitted him still to take his place in the ranks of those that wait upon thee; and, therefore, blessed be thy holy name!"

So far, you see, David's judgment is one in which we fully coincide: "Thou hast dealt with thy servant," and "Thou hast dealt well with him." But we also agree with him that *God has dealt with us according to his Word.* It greatly sweetens a blessing when we know that it comes to us by way of the promises. Whatever God has done to us, in love and kindness, is only just what he said he would do. Look back now, and see whether the print of providence does not exactly answer to the type of the promise. Concerning many things that we have needed, God said, "I will give them to you;" and now we can say to him, "Thou hast done so." He promised that he would be with us; he promised that he would bless us; he promised that bread should be given us, and that our waters should be sure; he said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" and all along he has acted according to his Word. Even when he has chastened us, he has only fulfilled his own Word, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." His pruning has been as Christ said it would be, "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." When he chastises us for our disobedience, he only fulfils his threatening, "If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." It is all according to the Word; and if anybody wants to know what the life of a Christian is, let him read what the promise of God is, for, as far as God is concerned in the life of a Christian, the promise is a prophecy of what it will be, and the prophecy is fulfilled in the life of every man who puts his trust in God.

Now this was a sound judgment on David's part, but it was a judgment at which he appears to have arrived after God's dealings with him were almost ended. It would be far better, and much wiser, if we could daily learn to say, "Thou art dealing well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy Word;" but we are often so foolish that, like old Jacob, we say, "All these things are against us." David probably felt that, in former days, he had often made a mistake, so he here corrects himself, and expresses a true and just judgment concerning the dealings of God with him. May we be taught to judge righteously of God while the work is still going on! Is there anybody here, out of all God's people, who will do otherwise? If so, let me just suggest that, if we cannot say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy Word," then,

in effect, we do say this, "Thou hast not dealt well with thy servant, O Lord; and thou hast not kept thy Word." Is there any child of God prepared to talk like that? Not one; and if you or I cannot say, "Thou art dealing well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy Word," then we are, in effect, saying, "Thou art not dealing well with thy servant, and thou art not acting according to thy Word." Are we prepared to say that? No, not to say it,—not to *say* it;—perhaps we should be more honest if we did; but if anybody thinks it, let him prostrate himself before the God of heaven and earth, and ask for the forgiveness of his ungrateful unbelief in daring to think that God can be otherwise than good and kind towards a soul redeemed with the heart's blood of Christ, chosen from before the foundation of the world, and ordained to everlasting glory with God himself. May we fall back again, then, upon the bold assertion of the text, and say to God, if we do not say it to anybody else,—say it as we walk home, and say it as we kneel by our bedside,—"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy Word; and blessed be thy holy name!"

Now I must pass on to speak very briefly concerning the other two heads; they are the practical application of this first one.

II. Secondly, we have to consider GOOD JUDGMENT DESIRED: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge."

David felt that his judgment had been greatly at fault, so that he had made great mistakes with regard to God; and now that he had come to a more correct judgment, he offered this prayer: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge." This is what all Christians need,—better judgment,—more good judgment,—more sound judgment.

May God help us, for the future, first, to *judge his providence better!*

> **"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,**
> **But trust him for his grace."**

Next, *judge your sufferings better*, and learn to believe that it is good for you that you have been afflicted. May we get our judgment more correct, so that it may not be so hasty, or so unbelieving! May our judgments not be, as they sometimes have been, desponding, dark, dreary! We need to have our judgments brightened up. Pray God to make them better.

Then we shall be able to have *good judgment in matters of doctrine.* I wish we could get all Christians to have good judgment in this respect. They go to hear one man, who is very fluent; he preaches Calvinistic doctrine, and it is very sweet to them. Another preaches Arminian doctrine, and contradicts all that the first one said; but to these people it is equally good, for he also is an eloquent man. Almost any error is sucked down by nine out of ten of the professors of the present day so long as it is sufficiently sugared. If you will but spice it well, it matters not to them what it is. I have been shocked to find how some will go, and listen to the veriest drivel, which is not the gospel of God at all, so long as it is but fitly spoken. May God give us good judgment upon this

matter! We have not as much as we ought to have, else we should have judged more wisely concerning much that we have heard.

"Lord, teach me good judgment and knowledge," means, "Let me know thee. Let me know thy truth. Let me know the voice of Christ, so that I may not follow a stranger, because I know not the voice of strangers, and have that discretion which is not to be deceived." There are some preachers who would deceive the very elect, if it were possible; but the true saints shall not be deceived, for God will teach them "good judgment and knowledge."

We also need *good judgment concerning our temptations.* We are often like silly little birds, which, for want of judgment, are allured by a bird call. Satan, like a cunning fowler with foolish birds, makes sure work of uninstructed Christians. They are taken as in a net; and if the Lord did not graciously deliver them, they could not escape. We need good judgment to spy out the hidden temptation, and to see through the devil's tricks and traps. He does not come to men showing his hoofs and horns; but he comes as an angel of light; and he is never so much a devil as when he appears to be an angel of light. I feel pleased to think that the Revised Version has altered that clause in the Lord's prayer to "Deliver us from the evil one." Some do not like it, because they do not believe in the evil one; or perhaps because they are too much his friend to wish to pray against him. But, in these days, he is so intensely arch an enemy, and he slinks about so craftily, that many people have begun to imagine that he no longer exists; and he can do ten times more mischief because of that delusion, so we will pray against him flat in his face, "Deliver us from the evil one. Give us good judgment and knowledge, that we may not be ignorant of his devices." We also need good judgment as to the many false spirits that are gone forth into the world. "Try the spirits," is an admonition that is still necessary, and we need to be taught good judgment that we may be able to do it, and discern between good and evil.

I will not detain you by speaking at any length upon this point, only I want just to say that, if we have been mistaken about God, the probability is that we have been mistaken about other things; and if the dealings even of our own Heavenly Father have sometimes perplexed us, and we have come to wrong conclusions concerning them, we ought to distrust our own judgment about other things, and constantly go to God the Holy Spirit for teaching and enlightening, offering this prayer, "Teach me good judgment." I wish that those who are troubled with scepticism and doubt would go to God in this way. If men who have difficulties would tell them to God in prayer, spreading out their dilemmas before the Most High, I believe he would teach them good judgment, and they would see their way where now everything seems to be dark and dubious. Let this plan be tried, and I believe it will not be tried in vain.

III. My last point is concerning JUDGMENT POSSESSED.

The psalmist had some good judgment, and therefore he asked for more. He possessed a measure of right judgment, which he expressed in these words, "I have believed

thy commandments." That is a very unusual expression; because, generally, people believe doctrines, or believe promises. But David says that he believed God's commandments. That is a phase of faith that is very seldom spoken of, and it means that, notwithstanding all David's troubles, he had believed God's sacred law to be a wise one, a just one, and a true one. He had believed that it came from God, and he had therefore reverenced it. He had believed it to be infinitely wise, and therefore he followed it. He believed it to be right, and therefore he stuck to it. He believed that, in the end, it would turn out to be the wisest policy to do as God had bidden him, so he stood to that. He seems to say, "Lord, I am very foolish, yet I have had wit enough given me, by thy Spirit, to believe that thy commandments are the best that can be, so I wish to keep them, and to believe that thy commandments are the best guide to me in life, and therefore I desire to follow them."

Brother, if thou dost not know much, yet, if thou knowest enough to be able to say to God, "I have believed thy commandments; and, by thy grace, I have not departed from thy truth," then all will come right with you. Suppose a man is tempted to steal. I do not mean to go and pilfer, but to falsify an account, or cheat in business, or what is much the same thing, to get money by borrowing it when he knows he cannot repay it. Well, the man who acts like that does not really believe God's commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." I have heard of one who wanted wood in winter time, and his neighbour in the next farm had a stack of wood. As he walked along the road, something whispered in his ear, "All things are yours." "Well," said he, "that thought comes from God; I will go and take home a log or two." When he had climbed over into the field, and begun to get the wood out of the stack, there came to his mind another passage of Scripture, "Thou shalt not steal," and he dropped the wood directly.

My dear friends, never believe an impression that is contrary to God's Word; in fact, I would like you not to believe any impression but that which comes from Scripture itself. I met, the other day, a person who was impressed that he was to preach for me. He said that it was revealed to him, by the Spirit of God, that he should preach for me one Sunday. I told him that he should do so when the Spirit of God also revealed it to me, but that I did not believe in lopsided revelations. I thought that it was needful for the revelation to come to me as well as to him. When it does, I will attend to it. Some people have, every now and then, a supposed revelation that just suits them. A man believes that it is impressed upon him to do exactly what he wants to do. For instance, he is sure that he ought to get married; many young people are quite sure about that matter when it would be far better for them not to do anything of the sort. A man is often impressed that he ought to do a thing simply because he wants to do it; the wish is father to the thought. Now, if you believe God's commandments, you will not always believe in what looks like a providence. Do you not know that there are devil's providences, sometimes; at least, that is

what I call them? When Jonah went down to flee unto Tarshish, he found a ship going there; was not that a remarkable providence? Perhaps he said to himself, "I felt some doubt about whether I was right in going there, but when I got down to the seashore, there was a ship, and there was just room for me to go as a passenger, and the fare was just the amount that I had got, and so I felt that it must be of the Lord." Nonsense, Jonah; it is of the Lord for you to do what is right; and if you have judgment enough to do that, let others be foolish enough to follow this impression or that, this whim or that, this notion or that, which may come to them from Satan, or their own evil hearts. Be you, dear friends, wise enough to stand to the plain commandments of the Word. God help you to do so, for uprightness and integrity shall preserve you, and nothing else will. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Those who do not believe God's commandments, and run off to all sorts of shifts, and schemes, and tricks of their own, will have to suffer for it. Pray to God to teach you good judgment; and if he has given you a measure of it, may he continually give you more and more, for his name's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM CXIX. 64—72.

Verses 64—67. *The earth, O* LORD, *is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O* LORD, *according unto thy word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray:—*

Prosperity had been to the psalmist like the gap in the hedge through which the sheep wander from the shepherd; but affliction had been to him like the prickly bushes that often stop the sheep from wandering still further, so he says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray:"—

67. *But now have I kept thy word.*

What a benefit, then, affliction had been to him; and what a blessing it often is to us! So, instead of dreading it, as we usually do, we ought to welcome it, and be on the look-out for the blessing which is to come to us through it. Many a child of God has joined with Dr. Watts in singing,—

"Father, I bless thy gentle hand;
How kind was thy chastising rod;
That forced my conscience to a stand,
And brought my wandering soul to God!

"Foolish and vain, I went astray
Ere I had felt thy scourges, Lord;
I left my guide, and lost my way;
But now I love and keep thy Word."

68. *Thou art good, and doest good;*

What a delightful description this is of God and his works! Who is good? Our Lord Jesus supplies the answer, "There is none good but one, that is, God." And his works are like himself: "Thou art good, and doest good."

68. *Teach me thy statutes.*

In the 25th Psalm, David wrote, "Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way;" and here, because the Lord is good, and does good, the psalmist prays, "Teach me thy statutes." He will teach us that which is good because he is himself good. What a blessing it is for us to have such a Teacher! How wonderful it is that God should be so condescending as to take us into his school!

69. *The proud have forged a lie against me:*

They have kept on hammering away until they have finished the falsehood; they have "forged" it, as one forges a deadly weapon in the fire.

69. *But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.*

"It is no use for me to trouble about them. When they have forged one lie, they will probably forge another, and there is practically no end to that black business. It is no use for me to try to answer them; I will turn to a far more profitable occupation: 'I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.'"

70. *Their heart is as fat as grease;*

Insensible, lifeless;—they have no conscience, no feeling; they are so proud of their prosperity that they are afflicted with fatty degeneration of the heart.

70. *But I delight in thy law.*

What a blessing it is for us to find our fatness there,—to delight in the marrow and fatness of God's law!

71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

The psalmist was so impressed with the benefits which he had derived from his afflictions, that he returned to the subject: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

There is much teaching power about God's rod. He always keeps one in his school, and it is greatly needed for such dull scholars as we are. Many a child of God can repeat the psalmist's testimony: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." "Thou hast whipped a little knowledge into me, and not much has come in any other way."

72. *The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.*

David had a great deal of gold and silver, far more than any of us have; but yet he thought very little of it in comparison with God's law. Many people despise gold and silver because they have not got any. The fox said the grapes were sour because they were beyond his reach. But here is a case, in which a man had as much gold and silver as he could ever want; yet he says that the law of God's mouth was better than all of it, and he was wise in saying so. For gold and silver can be stolen; riches often take to themselves wings, and fly away; even great wealth may soon be spent and gone; but God's law never leaves those who love it, nor lets them lose it. When all our spending money is gone, then is the commandment of God our treasure still. Happy is everyone who can say, with David, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—73 (PART II.), 681, 214.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE EVER-LIVING CHRIST.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 26TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, July 24th, 1881.

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen."—Revelation i. 18.

We long, sometimes, to behold Christ in his glory. Certainly, it is one of our brightest hopes that we shall see him as he is. Every true believer can say, with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." But, brethren, as we are now constituted, we are quite unfit for the vision of our Master's glory. It was well that, when he was on earth, he veiled himself in the form of man, for when he did uplift the veil a little, as he did on the mountain of transfiguration, the sight, though it was but a glimpse, was too much for Peter, and James, and John. They were overpowered by it, they fell asleep even upon the holy mount; and even when they were awake, they knew not what to say. And as we now are, if we could be favoured with a sight of Christ in his glory, it would be too much for us also. It was too much even for John, and we are far inferior to him; our eyes are not as clear and strong as his eyes were; yet he could not endure that wondrous vision. The grey old saint in Patmos had been familiar with his Master more years than most of us have known him; he had laid his head upon the Saviour's bosom,—a privilege accorded to none beside himself; he had stood at the cross, and seen the blood and water flow from that dear heart that loved him so well; and yet, though he was "that disciple whom Jesus loved," when even he had a sight of his glorified Master, he fell at his feet as dead. The full glory of Christ is too much for us to behold while we are here on the earth, so ask not to have it yet, dear friends. By-and-by, when you are fitted for it, and Christ has prepared a place for you, his prayer shall be fulfilled in your happy experience, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which

thou hast given me." He might say to each one of you, "Not yet, my child, not yet may you see me as I am; your eyes are not yet fit for such a sight as that."

Observe, beloved, how the Saviour comforted John when, through the excessive glory of the vision of his Lord, he swooned away, and was as one dead. First, he laid his right hand upon him; and that is where your comfort and mine must always come from,—from the hand that was crucified for us. There streams from that pierced hand a wondrous power that makes the weakest strong. A touch of it proves how near Christ is to us. We know, when he touches us, that he is man as well as God; and the familiar touch, which brings him so consciously near our spirit, makes us glad and joyous, and we become strong again. And if the fact of his incarnation—the truth that Christ is flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone,—should not suffice to cheer us, then he adds, as he did to John, "Fear not." The Master is saying that to each one of you who believe in him, but especially to such of you as are very faint and weak, and who feel that you are soon to die. He is drawing near to you, sisters and brothers, who are shortly to lay aside the frail tabernacle of this mortal body. The glintings and gleamings of the glory yet to be revealed overcome you; but he whispers in your ear, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead." All these words are full of good cheer to spirits that faint away with expectation of the coming of the King, and to hearts that are ravished with desire for the company of the Best-beloved.

"Fear not," says he; and that we also may not fear, let us now look into the things here made known which ought to be a cause of strength and comfort to us. They seem to me to be three; though there are many more, there are three that strike me most. The first is, *the identity of Christ.* However glorious he may be, and his very face is as the sun when he shineth in his strength, yet he is the same Christ as when he was here on earth: "I am he that liveth, and was dead." Those words prove to us the identity of Christ. The next ground of sweet comfort, whenever we think of Christ in his glory, is *the perfection of his work*, which is implied in the expression, "and was dead." He has nothing to do with death now; so far as he is personally concerned, that is all over. You see that the words are in the past tense: "I am he that liveth, *and was dead.*" And then, thirdly, the great source of heart-cheer to every believer, as he trembles in the presence of his glorified Master, is the fact of *Christ's eternal existence:* "I am alive for evermore." He will never again be the dead Christ of Calvary: "I am alive for evermore, Amen."

I. Let us begin, then, with the first great truth that I mentioned,—and I must necessarily speak somewhat hurriedly on each one,—THE IDENTITY OF OUR BLESSED MASTER should greatly comfort us when we think of his glory.

Christ in heaven is the same as he was here. A great change has passed over him; but not a change as to his identity or his nature,—and especially not a change as to his heart of love to us,

for he is "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,"—absolutely the same. He who now maketh all heaven bright with his presence is the selfsame Christ who was born at Bethlehem, trod the waves of Galilee's storm-tossed lake, hung upon the cross, was wrapped in the cerements of death, and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa. That same Jesus has risen from the dead, and is now sitting at the right hand of God, reigning over all worlds. I want specially to bring before you this one thought, that while Christ was here, during the forty days after his resurrection, he was manifestly the same Jesus that he had been during his earthly life. We will not suppose, we cannot imagine, that any change has taken place in him since then. The forty days of his glory on earth were a fair specimen of what he now is, and he was then the selfsame Jesus that the disciples had known before he was crucified.

There were certain points about him in which he made it quite clear that he was the same; the first was, *his tenderness*. He was always meek and lowly, gentle and kind; and he was just the same after he rose from the dead. Mark tells us that, "when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." There is a fine touch of tenderness in that mention of the seven devils in connection with Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene. She was one who loved him much; she had been one of the last to watch by the sepulchre, and now she was to be the first to meet her Lord after he had risen from the dead. It was just like Christ to manifest himself first to her; to find out one of the weakest of his followers, one of those who loved him most, and one for whom he had already done the most.

Then, it was just like him to send his angel with this message to the women, "Go your way, tell his disciples,"—the very men who had all forsaken him, and fled, the cowards who had deserted him in his hour of greatest need,—"tell his disciples"—and then follows that tender, Christlike touch,—"tell his disciples *and Peter*"—poor, wilful Peter, who said that he would die rather than deny his Lord, yet he did deny him with oaths and curses; yet Christ sent him a special personal message, "tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." I am quite sure that this is the same Christ who said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

Then, further on, dear brethren, notice Christ's tenderness to Thomas. Even after Christ had risen from the grave a whole week, Thomas was still unbelieving. He had said that he would not believe that his Lord had risen unless he could see in his hands the print of the nails, and put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into the wound in Christ's side. On the second Sabbath, the Master came again to his disciples, and after saying to them, "Peace be unto you," he spoke to Thomas no word of anger, but simply said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands;

and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." There were, necessarily, some rebukes during that memorable period, for love must rebuke that which is not right; but those rebukes were like the reproof of which David said, "It shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." They were just such rebukes as always come from Jesus, and only from Jesus; so we are sure it was the selfsame man who had both died and risen again.

And if another instance is needed to complete and crown the evidence, look at our Lord when he invited the disciples to eat fish with him by the lake, and then afterwards said to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Thrice he repeated the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" and then he commissioned him to feed his lambs and act as under-shepherd to his sheep. That was exactly like Christ; there was no counterfeit about such an action as that. He might there and then have said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead;" the disciples would have recognized the tones of his voice, the manner of his speech, and the spirit of his rebuke. Everything about it was so tender that it could not have been imitated, and we say at once, as John said to Peter, "It is the Lord." We cry, like Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

A second characteristic which, in connection with other things, proves the identity of Christ, is *his energy*. If Christ, after the resurrection, had been very slow, dull, heavy, lethargic, we should have said, "This is not he who was eaten up with the zeal of God's house; this is not the Christ who was clad with zeal as with a cloak." But on that day of our Lord's resurrection, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to Simon Peter; then, toward evening, he joined the two disciples going to Emmaus, and after he had revealed himself to them, they could scarcely reach Jerusalem before he was there in the midst of the eleven saying, "Peace be unto you." We have not a complete record of all that transpired during those forty days; but we have sufficient to show us that our Lord was busy, here and there, showing himself, sometimes to little groups of two or three, and at one time to as many as five hundred brethren at once; and we can see that his never-tiring energy was steadily maintained through those days of his glory-life while yet he tabernacled here below.

Another point, too, is specially noticeable in the records of those forty days; and that is, *the constant Scripturalness of the blessed Master's talk*. You know that, in his day, even the religious people did not quote Scripture as he did. The Rabbis said, "Rabbi Yohannin has said," or "Rabbi Simeon has said," or "Rabbi Levi has said so-and-so and so-and-so." But Christ quoted nothing from the Rabbis. On the way to Emmaus, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." It was always his custom so to do; and, often, he seemed to go out of his way to do or say something "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." He was always careful that, by some act or word of his, he might fulfil a prophecy which,

perhaps, we never should have understood if he had not fulfilled it. So, after he had risen from the dead, if he had not been a Bible-loving Christ, we might have questioned whether he was the same Christ. I have reminded you what he said to the two disciples going to Emmaus; and when he was back at Jerusalem among the eleven, he said to them, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." His constant reference to the Word, his manifest delight in quoting it, the Scripturalness of his whole conversation,—all this is clear and convincing evidence that he was the same Christ who, all his life, from the temptation in the wilderness to his death on the cross, constantly quoted the Scriptures. There was no other such teacher, in his day, who continually drew his instruction from the written Word; he was the one lone man who was mighty in the Scriptures, and who perpetually quoted them in his prelections; and as he continued to do so after his resurrection, this was another proof of his identity; he was the selfsame Christ, depend upon it.

There was another trait in his character which must not be forgotten; that is, *his love for the souls of men.* Does that come out after his resurrection? Ay, it does; not only in the incidents to which I have referred, but also in his declaration "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." I can see a great deal in those three words, "beginning at Jerusalem." Depend upon it, they were spoken by the man who wept over Jerusalem, and who cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" "Give them one more opportunity of coming to me," says he, "preach repentance and remission of sins, in my name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." That is the man, I am sure, of whom it is written, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." The Pharisees and scribes said of him, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;" that is why he said to his apostles, "Begin with the greatest sinners first: 'beginning at Jerusalem.'" I know it is he, it must be the Christ himself; for, ere he died, he prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;" and having risen from the dead, it was for those very murderers that he gave his commission of grace and mercy. His care for men, and for the very worst of them; and his love for souls, and for those that were most of all in need of his pity and forgiveness; prove that he was the same Christ who "was moved with compassion on the multitudes, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."

One other thing I may note, for it helps to prove the identity of

Christ; that is, *his mention of the Spirit;* for, in those times, there were none but Christ who preached about the Spirit of God. I greatly fear that there are not very many who do so now. Oh, how the Spirit of God is neglected in many sermons! I heard of one preacher, of whom it was said that people who listened to him did not know whether there was any Holy Ghost; they had not heard of him for so long that they thought surely he must have ceased to operate. But our Lord continually mentioned the Spirit. In that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" In that blessed chapter, where he tells us about the Comforter whom the Father would send to us in his name, he showed that he was himself clothed with the Spirit, and he spake much of the Spirit. Now see how he spoke after he had risen from the dead; could anything be plainer than this: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high"? In his last words to his disciples, there is always this reference and deference to the Spirit, this witness to the necessity of his operations, this warning to his followers that they can do nothing without him, that they cannot preach the gospel successfully except the Spirit of God be with them. That is the selfsame Christ upon whom the Spirit rested without measure, I am sure it is he; and when he says, "I am he that liveth,—and was dead," all the tokens of the forty days go to prove the identity of the risen Christ with the Christ who died upon the cross.

Let us dwell on that thought for just a minute ere we pass on. Christ in glory is none other than he was here. No man ever loses anything by going to heaven; an ordinary man gains much by going there, so I am sure my Lord is none the worse for entering into his glory; he is none the less tender, none the less zealous, none the less mighty to save; but just as we might have been glad to run to him when he was here, so may we gladly go to him now, for he is just the same.

II. Now I must speak very briefly upon the second head, although I might enlarge upon it to almost any extent, for it relates to THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST.

When our Lord used to John the words "was dead," and applied them to himself, he meant that *he had performed the crucial part of the atonement.* The very central point of the atonement was death; there was no way of making atonement for sin except by the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. There must be life to atone for sin, and that life sacrificed; and, therefore, Christ "was dead." It was no dream, no delusion, no sleep, no swoon, no coma; he "was dead." Though it was not possible for our blessed and glorious Saviour to be holden by the bands of death, yet he "was dead."

This meant, further, that *Christ's work was ended, and done with.*

There are some people who talk about presenting the perpetual sacrifice of the mass. There is, perhaps, no grosser blasphemy under heaven than the idea that we can offer up the body and blood of Christ again. "Once for all" Jesus died, but he is not a dead Christ now. Pictures of Christ dead, and crucifixes, and all things of that sort, may to some extent represent what he was, but they do not represent what he is. I should not care to have, hanging up in my house, the picture of a dead friend, representing him as he looked when he was dead, especially if he had been raised to life again. I would rather wait for his portrait till I could get one of him alive, for the picture of a dead man is not the man's likeness at all. I saw in a friend's house, the other day, the likeness of a minister, and I said, "Oh, dear, how ghastly he looks!" The gentleman replied, "I am told that the photograph was taken after he was dead." "Well, then," I said, "put it away at once, pray put it away. That is not the likeness of the man at all, for the man was gone before it was taken." So, dear friends, do not feel any kind of reverence for representations of the dead Christ, because he is not dead, and we ought not to think of him as dead. I have seen, and some of you must also have seen, in Roman Catholic countries, figures of the Saviour on the cross, till you have grown sick of the sight, and you have said, "If there is anything that could drive me away from being a Christian, it is these perfectly hideous caricatures of Christ that some people stick up at every corner of the road." Christ is not dead. He "was dead." It is in the past tense, never forget that; but he is not dead now. "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said;" and our trust is not in a dead Christ, but in the ever-living Christ who is still able "to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Recollect, also, dear friends, that, in the enterprise upon which our Lord's heart was set,—the enterprise of saving men,—*the love which led him to die is living love.* He has proved, once for all, and beyond all doubt, how much he loves his people: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He has done that, and therefore he has proved his love to guilty men in a way that is perfectly indisputable; and—

> "Now though he reigns exalted high,
> His love is still as great."

And remember, next, that *the purpose of Christ in dying will certainly be accomplished,* now that he has laid down his life for his people, and taken it up again. I am not one of those who think that the result of Christ's death ever hung in jeopardy for a single moment. I believe that all he intended to do by his death will be done; and that there is not one soul, for whom he stood as Substitute, that shall ever be lost. He has paid the debt for all his elect, and they shall never be charged with their debts again; they are gone, and gone for ever. If the Son of God has actually laid down his life to achieve a certain purpose, I cannot suppose that he will be prevented from achieving it. I can imagine myself living and

dying for a certain end, and yet being foiled, for I am but a man; but I am not capable of such blasphemy as would be involved in believing that the Son of God could ever be born and live for a certain set purpose, and die to carry out that purpose, and yet not accomplish it. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He "was dead," and he has therefore put forth all his strength for the accomplishment of the end he had in view, and that end will certainly be achieved.

And recollect, too, that *the merit of his death abides.* He "was dead;" but all the merit of that death is just as efficacious to-day as though he had only died to-day. Imagine for a moment that this was the morning of Christ's resurrection, that I stood here to tell you that I had gone with Mary Magdalene, and seen his empty tomb, and that he had spoken to me as he did to her. With what freshness and power would I talk to you about those dear wounds of his, and about the meaning of his death, and the sacrifice which he had offered. Well, now, although more than eighteen hundred years have passed since his resurrection, it is just as fresh to God, and just as acceptable to God as ever it was. Still does he approve of the atoning sacrifice of the Well-beloved, and the merit of it comes up perpetually before him like the odour of sweet incense.

This is a glad, a joyous theme, over which I would fain linger,—to think that Christ's work is all done, all finished, all complete; there is nothing more needing to be done for his people's redemption; as he himself said, ere he gave up the ghost, "It is finished." That expression "was dead" comes to me like the sound of a peal of bells tolling the death of death, and ringing in the jubilee of all who believe in Jesus. He "was dead," but he is dead no longer; he lives now, and he is "alive for evermore."

III. With that third word of comfort I am going to conclude. The eternal existence of Christ should always comfort us whenever we think of his glory. He that was dead is "alive for evermore."

Here, then, ye warriors of the cross, is *unique leadership.* Never did men before have such a leader as this one, who has proved his ardour for the accomplishment of his purpose by dying to achieve it, and who now lives to see that purpose fully accomplished. When Mohammed was alive,—false prophet though he was,—he inspired his followers with extraordinary enthusiasm when he snatched up a handful of dust from the road, and flung it in the faces of his adversaries, crying, as he did so, "Let them be blinded." His followers believed that a miracle would really be wrought, and they therefore rushed upon their enemies, and swept them away like chaff before the whirlwind. Yet now that Mohammed is dead and gone, his religion wanes, and must in time expire; but our Master is not dead, our Leader is alive. He still rides at the head of the army of the cross, and calls us to battle for truth and right. The ungodly hear him not; but as many as believe in him still hear his clear voice ringing out the command, "Onward, hosts of God! Forward to the fight! 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,' until I come."

We take comfort from the fact that we are led by the living Christ. When the Cid, Rodrigo Diaz, had been slain in battle, those who had been accustomed to dread his mighty sword did not for a time know that he was dead. His followers mounted the dead Cid on horseback; and the very sight of him, though it was only his corpse that they saw, made his adversaries fly before him. We set no dead Christ in the forefront of our army; it is the living Christ who marches before us, and therefore we are confident of victory, for never was host so led as by him who can say, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore."

Next, here is *a singular guarantee.* He, who was dead, is now alive; then, brethren, he will carry on his work. If, when he died, he had never risen again, but had left his cause in our puny hands, it would soon have failed. But he has risen; and "he shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." His kingdom shall extend to the utmost bounds of the earth; "they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust." Be ye sure of this, beloved, that there is a guarantee of victory in the fact that Christ is still alive. In these dreary times in which we live, men tell us that Christianity is a failure, that the gospel is a delusion, and I do not know what is not going to happen. Yes, yes; but there is one very important thing which they omit to mention. He lives, *he lives,* HE LIVES, who can never be crucified again. The Lord hath set him as King upon his holy hill of Zion, and though "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision;" for the Lord reigneth, and he shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah.

In addition to this unique leadership, and this singular guarantee of success, we have also here *special encouragement to sinners.* I verily believe that, if my Master were here to-night in bodily presence, there are some of you, who have been seeking him, who would come, and fall at his feet; ay, you would be only too glad if you might wash his feet with your tears, and wipe them with the hairs of your head. Well, he is living, and he is here, though you cannot see him or touch him; and you may come to him. You have not to travel any distance with weary feet in order to get to him; your minds can get to him at once. Forget your eyes awhile; they are poor dim things that hinder true sight. That may seem to be a strange description of our eyes, but it is true; and when we have got rid of them, we shall see much better than we do now. But, oh! for once, believe without seeing; believe that Jesus Christ is near you, and ask him to save you. Come to him, and by faith touch the hem of his garment just as if he were here corporeally. Cry to him, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me;" for he will hear you, and grant your request. Say, "Lord, that I might receive my sight;" and he will spiritually open your eyes now even as, in the days of his flesh, he literally opened the eyes of blind men.

You may well come to him, for he is just the same Jesus as he used to be when he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He lives, *he lives*, He lives; therefore, go to your homes, and find him there; go to your bedrooms, and tell him that you need him, cast yourselves down before him in humble penitence and true faith, and he will save you, he will bless you, because he still liveth to make intercession for all that come unto God by him.

Now I close by noticing that there is something in this text which has *a solemn warning* in it; for Christ lives, and as he lives, woe be to those who persecute his people! Woe be to those who make a jest of him, or trifle with his truth, neglect his gospel, and put off seeking their own salvation until to-morrow! O my dear hearers, if Christ were dead, we ought to respect his memory; but since he lives, remember that he takes cognizance of every insult to his cause; and though he is ever ready to forgive, yet, if your ears refuse the invitations of his grace, if you hold out against his warnings and entreaties, he will surely come again, and when he cometh, there will be upon that face of love something which you will dread more than all the lightnings and thunders of the last tremendous day. What, think you, is the most dreadful thing in the day of judgment? The fairest sight that e'er was seen by mortal men,—the face that causes the holy angels to sing, and that makes heaven for the saints;—the face of Christ,—love and justice, gentleness and truth, Godhead and manhood blended in that matchless face; and while his saints clap their hands with jubilant exultation at the sight of him, the most awful thing in all the world to the ungodly will be that face; for, as they look into it, and see the lines of suffering, and of suffering despised,—and see the marks of love, and of love rejected,—of majesty, and of majesty that has been insulted,—as they look there, they will cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" O sirs, that must be a dreadful thing which turns the best thing in heaven into an object of the utmost terror! So, give up that sin of yours, I pray you. Give up that unbelief. Give up that self-righteousness. Give up everything that will, as it were, curdle the very love of Christ till even his great love shall turn to jealousy, for fiercer than the lion with his prey is love when once it is transformed into wrath. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him," for their confidence is in him who still says, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." God bless you, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book"—307, 334, 326.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

HEBREWS V.

Verse 1. *For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:*

Notice that the high priests were taken from among men, not from among angels. Hence, our Lord Jesus Christ "took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." The Jewish high priests were ordained for men; they acted on behalf of men, and they stood in the place of men. So the Lord Jesus Christ stood in the room, place, and stead of his people, that he might offer to God for them two things,—gifts,—that is, such offerings as the Jew made when he presented the fine flour, and oil, and other bloodless oblations which were only intended for thanksgiving. Christ offered thanksgiving unto his Father, and that offering was a sweet savour unto God. But beside those gifts, the priests offered sacrifices, and our Lord Jesus Christ did the same, for he was made a sin-offering for us, though he himself knew no sin.

2. *Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way;*

The marginal reading is, "Who can reasonably bear with the ignorant,"—that is, one who does not lose his temper even when they are very slow to learn what he teaches them. Having taught them nineteen times, and finding that they do not understand or remember the lesson, he is ready to teach them the twentieth time, he is one who will give them line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, because he has compassion on the ignorant.

Then there were others who tried the high priest far more even than the ignorant did, they were those who erred from the right path, those who went out of the way, and who continued to do so even after many warnings and much earnest exhortation. The true priest must have patience with people of this sort.

2. *For that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.*

So all the high priests under the law were. They had to confess their own ignorance, they had to admit their own errings and wanderings, and therefore they could the more readily have patience with others. Our Lord Jesus Christ had neither ignorance nor sin of his own, but he has become so completely one with his people, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that he can have compassion upon us, ignorant and out of the way as we may be. Are you distressed, my brethren and sisters, because you feel your own ignorance? Do you mourn because you have gone astray? You have to come to no angry Christ; you have to approach One who will be very gentle toward you. Come boldly to him, then; confess your folly, and expect the pardon that he is waiting to bestow.

3. *And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.*

We know that, being compassed with infirmity and imperfection, the high priests first offered sacrifices on their own account, and then afterwards offered them on behalf of the people. Christ, being pure and holy, needed no sacrifice for himself; but he did offer a complete, and acceptable, and sufficient sacrifice for us.

4. *And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.*

Men could not constitute themselves high priests; for the appointment was made by God alone.

5, 6. *So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

Beloved, there is rich comfort for all believers in the fact that Christ is God's appointed and accepted High Priest. God ordained him to do what he has done, and is doing, and will do; and therefore it is impossible but that God should accept him and all his work.

7, 8. *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;*

Just as the earthly high priests offered sacrifices for themselves, so Christ, though he needed not to offer sacrifice for himself, did need to pray for himself. You know, beloved, how he gave himself unto prayer upon the cold mountains at midnight, and how Gethsemane's garden witnessed the bloody sweat falling in clots to the ground.

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." God had one Son without sin, but he never had a son without suffering. We may escape the rod if we are not of the family of God, but the true-born child must not, and would not if he might, avoid that chastisement of which all such are partakers.

9. *And being made perfect,—*

That is, perfect in his obedience, perfect as a sacrifice, perfect as the Mediator and Substitute for his people,—

9. *He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;*

Brethren, what a grand expression that is, "eternal salvation"! You know that there are some who preach a temporary salvation; they say that you may be in Christ to-day and out of Christ to-morrow, that you may be saved by grace at one hour, but damned by sin the next. Ah! but the Bible says no such thing. This may be the gospel according to Arminius, but it is not the gospel according to John, nor according to Paul, nor according to our Lord Jesus Christ. That gospel is,—

> "Once in Christ, in Christ for ever;
> Nothing from his love can sever."

Christ became the author of "eternal salvation," and the word "eternal" must mean without end; so that, if we once receive the salvation which Christ has wrought out, we are saved in time, and shall be saved throughout all eternity. Christ is the Author of this eternal salvation; not our good works, though our faith and our works become the evidences of our having received this eternal salvation.

10. *Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.*

Then the apostle appeared to be going on to enlarge upon the Melchisedec priesthood, but he stopped. Perhaps he recollected what his Master said to his disciples on one occasion, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now." In a similar fashion Paul writes:—

11—14. *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MEDITATION ON GOD.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, in the summer of 1858.

"My meditation of him shall be sweet."—Psalm civ. 34.

DAVID, certainly, was not a melancholy man. Eminent as he was for his piety and for his religion, he was equally eminent for his joyfulness and gladness of heart. Read the verse that precedes my text, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord." It has often been insinuated, if it has not been openly said, that the contemplation of divine things has a tendency to depress the spirits. Religion, many thoughtful persons have supposed, doth not become the young; it checks the ardour of their youthful blood. It may be very well for men with grey heads, who need something to comfort and solace them as they descend the hill of life into the grave; it may be well enough for those who are in poverty and deep trial; but that it is at all congruous with the condition of a healthy, able-bodied, successful, and happy man, is generally said to be out of the question.

Now, there is no greater falsehood than this. No man is so happy but he would be happier still if he had true religion. The man with a fulness of earthly pleasures, whose barns are full of corn, and whose presses burst with new wine, would not lose any part of his happiness, had he the grace of God in his heart; rather, that joy would add sweetness to all his prosperity, it would strain off many of the bitter dregs from his cup, it would purify his heart, and freshen his tastes for delights, and show him how to extract more honey from the honeycomb. Religion is a thing that can make the most melancholy joyful, at the same time that it can make the joyous ones more joyful still. It can make the gloomy bright, as it gives the oil of joy in the place of mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Moreover, it can light up the face that is joyous with a heavenly gladness; it can make the eye sparkle with tenfold more brilliance; and happy as

the man may be, he shall find that there is sweeter nectar than he has ever drunk before, if he comes to the fountain of atoning mercy, if he knows that his name is registered in the book of everlasting life. Temporal mercies will then have the charm of redemption to enhance them. They will be no longer to him as shadowy phantoms which dance for a transient hour in the sunbeam. He will account them more precious because they are given to him, as it were, in some codicils of the divine testament, which hath promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. While goodness and mercy follow him all the days of his life, he will stretch forth his grateful anticipations to the future, when he shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. He will be able to say, as the psalmist does here, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet."

Taking those last few words as the motto of our discourse, I shall speak, first, concerning *a very profitable exercise*,—"meditation;" secondly, concerning *a very precious subject:* "My meditation of *him;* and, thirdly, concerning *a very blessed result:* "My meditation of him shall be *sweet*."

I. First, here is A VERY PROFITABLE EXERCISE,—"*meditation*."

Meditation is a word that more than half of you, I fear, do not know how to spell. You know how to repeat the letters of the word; but I mean to say, you cannot spell it in the reality of life. You do not occupy yourselves with any meditation. What do many of you who are merchants know concerning this matter? You rise up in the morning just in time to take your accustomed seat in the omnibus; you hasten to your countinghouse for your letters, and there you continue all day long, for business when you are busy, or for gossip when business is dull, and at night you go home too tired and jaded for the wholesome recreation of your minds. Week by week, month by month, and year by year, it is still with you one everlasting grind, grind, grind. You have no time for meditation; and you reckon, perhaps, that if you were to set apart half an hour in the day to ponder the weighty matters of eternity, it would be to you a clear loss of time. It is very wise of you to economise your minutes; but I suppose that, if half an hour in a day could earn you a hundred pounds, you would not say that you could not afford it, because you know how to estimate pecuniary profit. Now, if you equally knew how to count the great profit of meditation, you would deem it a positive gain to yourselves to spend some time therein, for meditation is most profitable to the spirit, it is an extremely healthful and excellent occupation. Far from being wasted time, it is a judicious employment of time.

Do not imagine that the meditative man is necessarily lazy; contrariwise, he lays the best foundation for useful works. He is not the best student who reads the most books, but he who meditates the most upon them; he shall not learn most of divinity who hears the greatest number of sermons, but he who meditates the most devoutly upon what he does hear; nor shall he be so profound a scholar who takes down ponderous volumes one after the other, as

he who, reading little by little, precept upon precept, and line upon line, digests what he reads, and assimilates each sentiment to his heart by meditation,—receiving the word first into his understanding, and afterwards receiving the spirit of it into his own soul. Meditation is thus a very excellent employment. Let me for a few minutes tell you some of its uses.

First, I think meditation furnishes the mind somewhat with rest. *It is the couch of the soul.* The time that a man spends in necessary rest, he never reckons to be wasted, because he is refreshing and renovating himself for further exertion. Meditation, then, is the rest of the spirit. "Oh!" says one, "I must have rest. Here have I been fagging and toiling incessantly for months; I must have a day's excursion; I must do this thing, and the other." Yes, and such recreation, in its proper place, is desirable; we ought to have seasons of innocent recreation; but, at the same time, if many of us knew how to spend a little time daily in the calm repose of contemplative retirement, we should find ourselves less exhausted by the wear and tear of our worldly duties. To meditate, would be to us a salutary recreation; and instead of running ourselves out of breath, and labouring till a respite is compulsory, we should spread our intervals of ease and refreshing over the whole year, and secure a small portion every day, by turning aside from the bustling crowd to meditate upon whatever subject we wish to occupy the most honourable place in our mind.

Just as a change of posture relieves the weariness of the body, a change of thoughts will prevent your spirits becoming languid. Sit down in a silent chamber, at eventide, throw the window up, and look at God's bright stars, and count those eyes of heaven; or if you like it better, pause in the noontide heat, and look down upon the busy crowd in the streets, and count the men like so many ants, upon the ant-hill of this world; or if you care not to look about you, sit down and look within yourself, count the pulses of your own heart, and examine the emotions of your own breast. At times, 'tis well to muse upon heaven; or if thou art a man loving to revel in the prophetic future, turn over the mystic page, and study the sacred visions recorded in the Book of Daniel, or the Book of Revelation. As thou dost enter these hallowed intricacies, and dost meditate upon these impressive symbols, thou wilt rise up from thy study mightily refreshed. You will find it like a couch to your mind.

Again, meditation is *the machine in which the raw material of knowledge is converted to the best uses.* Let me compare it to a wine-press. By reading, and research, and study, we gather the grapes; but it is by meditation that we press out the juice of those grapes, and obtain the wine. How is it that many men who read very much know very little? The reason is, they read tome upon tome, and stow away knowledge with lumbering confusion inside their heads, till they have laid so much weight on their brain that it cannot work. Instead of putting facts into the press of meditation, and fermenting them till they can draw out right inferences, they leave them to rot and perish. They extract none of the sweet juice

of wisdom from the precious fruits of the vine. I like, when I have read a book for about half an hour, to walk awhile, and think it over. I shut up the volume, and say, "Now, Mr. Author, you have made your speech, let me think over what you have said. A little meditation will enable me to distinguish between what I knew before and the fresh subject you have communicated to me,—between your facts and your opinions,—between your arguments and those I should make from the same premises." Animals, after they have eaten, lie down and ruminate; they first crop the grass, and afterwards digest it. So, meditation is the rumination of the soul; thereby we get that nutriment which feeds and supports the mind.

When thou hast gathered flowers in the field or garden, arrange them in proper order, and bind them together with the string of memory; but take heed that thou dost put them into the water of meditation, else they will soon fade, and be fit only for the dung-hill. When thou hast gathered pearls from the sea, recollect that thou wilt have gathered with them many worthless shells, and much mud; therefore, sort them in thy memory, and only keep those that are worth preserving. Thou must also open the oyster to extract the pearl, and polish it to make it appear more beautiful. Thou mayest not string it in the necklace of thy mind, until it has been rubbed and garnished by meditation. Thus, you see that we need meditation to make use of what we have discovered. As it is the rest of the soul, so it is, at the same time, the means of making the best use of what the soul has acquired.

Again, *meditation is to the soul what oil was to the body of the wrestlers.* When those old athletes went out to wrestle, they always took care, before they went, to oil themselves well, to make their joints supple and fit for their task. Now, meditation makes the soul supple,—makes it so that it can use things when they come into the mind. Who are the men that can go into a controversy, and get the mastery? Why, the men who meditate when they are alone. Who are the men that can preach? Not those who gad about, and never commune with their own hearts alone; but those who think earnestly as well when no one is near them as when there is a crowd around them. Who are the authors to write your books, and keep up the constant supply of literature? They are meditative men. They keep their bones supple and their limbs fit for exercise by continually bathing themselves in the oil of meditation. How important, therefore, is meditation as a mental exercise, to have our minds in constant readiness for any service!

I have thus pointed out to you that meditation is in itself useful to every man. But you did not come here to listen to a merely moral essay; you came to hear something about the gospel of God; and what I have said already is but an introduction to what I have to say concerning the great necessity of meditation in religion. As meditation is good for the mind, even upon worldly topics and natural science, *much more is it useful when we come to spiritual learning.* The best and most saintly of men have been men of meditation. Isaac went out into the fields at eventide to meditate.

David says, "I will meditate in thy statutes." Paul, who himself meditated continually on all that related to the gospel, writing to Timothy concerning the important things needful in a good minister of Jesus Christ, says, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." To the Christian, meditation is most essential. I should almost question the being of a Christian, and I should positively deny his well-being, who lived habitually without meditation. Meditation and prayer are twin-sisters, and both of them appear to me equally necessary to Christian life. I think meditation must exist where there is prayer, and prayer is sure to exist where there is meditation.

My brethren, there is nothing more wanting to make Christians grow in grace, nowadays, than meditation. Most of you are painfully negligent in this matter. You remind me of a sermon that one of my quaint old friends in the country once preached from the text, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." He told us that many people, who would hunt for a sermon, were too lazy to roast it by meditation. They knew not how to put the jack of memory through it, and then to twist it round by meditation before the fire of piety, and so to cook it, and make it fit for their soul's food. So is it with many of you; after you have caught the sermon, you allow it to run away. How often do you, through lack of meditation, miss the entire purpose for which the discourse was designed! Unless you meditate upon the truths we declare unto you, you will gather little sweetness, you will acquire little profit, and, certainly, you will be in no wise established therein to your edification. Can you get the honey from the comb until you press it? You may be refreshed while you listen to the sermon, but it is the meditation afterwards which extracts the honey, and gets the best and most luscious savour therefrom.

Let me tell you that *there ought to be special times for meditation.* I think every man should set apart a portion of each day for this gracious exercise. A Christian will ever be in a lean state if he has no time for sacred musings before his God. Those men who know most of God are such as meditate most upon him. Those who realize most experimentally the doctrines of grace, are those who meditate and soar beyond the reach of all sublunary things. I think we shall never have much advancement in our churches until the members thereof begin to accept habitually the counsel, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee;" or that other, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Till the din and noise of business somewhat abate, and we give ourselves to calmer thought, and in the solemn silence of the mind find at once our heaven and our God, we must expect to have regiments of dwarfs, and only here and there a giant. Giant minds cannot be nourished by mere casual hearing; gigantic souls must have meditation to support them. Would ye be strong? Would ye be mighty? Would ye be valiant for the Lord, and useful in his cause? Take care that ye follow the occupation of the psalmist David, and meditate. This is a very happy and profitable exercise.

II. Now, secondly, let us consider A VERY PRECIOUS SUBJECT: "My meditation of *him* shall be sweet."

Christian! thou needest no greater inducement to excite thee than the subject here proposed: "My meditation of him shall be sweet." To whom does that word "him" refer? I suppose it may refer to all the three Persons of the glorious Trinity: "My meditation upon Jehovah shall be sweet." And, verily, if you sit down to *meditate upon God the Father*, and muse upon his sovereign, immutable, unchangeable love toward his elect people,—if you think of God the Father as the great Author and Originator of the plan of salvation,—if you think of him as the mighty Being who, by two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for him to lie, hath given us strong consolation who have fled for refuge to Christ Jesus,—if you look to him as the Giver of his only-begotten Son, and who, for the sake of that Son, his best gift, will, with him also, freely give us all things,—if you consider him as having ratified the covenant, and pledged himself ultimately to complete all his stipulations, in the ingathering of every chosen, ransomed soul, you will perceive that there is enough to engross your meditation for ever, even were your attention limited to the manifestation of the Father's love.

Or, if you choose to do so, you may *meditate upon God the Holy Spirit.* Consider his marvellous operations on your own heart,—how he quickened it when you were dead in trespasses and sins,—how he brought you nigh to Jesus when you were a lost sheep, wandering far from the fold,—how he called you, with such a mighty efficacy that you could not resist his voice,—how he drew you with the bands of love which would not let you go. If you think how often he has helped you in the hour of peril,—how frequently he has comforted you with his promises in times of distress and trouble; and if you remember that, like holy oil, he will always supply your lamp, and until life's latest hour he will always replenish you with his influences, proving himself still your Teacher and your Guide till you get up yonder, where you shall see your Saviour face to face, in the blessed presence of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost,—in such great truth you may well find a vast and, indeed, an infinite subject for your meditation.

But, to-night, I prefer rather to confine this word "him" to *the person of our adorable Saviour:* "My meditation of him shall be sweet." Ah! if it be possible that the meditation upon one Person of the Trinity can excel the meditation upon another, it is meditation upon Jesus Christ.

"'Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.

"But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace forgives my sins."

Thou precious Jesus! what can be a sweeter theme for me to think of than thine exalted being,—to conceive of thee as the Son of God, who, with the golden compasses, struck out a circle from space, and fashioned this round world? To think of thee as the God who holds this mighty orb upon thy shoulders, thou who art the King of glory, before whom angels bow in lowliest homage; and yet to consider thee as likewise bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh,—

"In ties of blood with sinners one;"—

to conceive of thee as the Son of Mary, born of a virgin, made flesh like ordinary men, clothed in garments of humanity like mortals of our feeble race; to picture thee in all thy suffering life, to trace thee in all thy passion, to view thee in the agony of Gethsemane, enduring the bloody sweat, the sore amazement; and then to follow thee to the pavement, Gabbatha, and thence up the steep side of Calvary, bearing the cross, braving the shame, when thy soul was made an offering for my sins, when thou didst die the reconciling death 'midst horrors still to all but God unknown. Verily, here is a meditation for my soul, which must be "sweet" for ever. I might, like the psalmist, say, "My heart is inditing a good matter;" the marginal reading is, "it boileth, or bubbleth up, while I speak of the things which I have made touching the King: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer."

Christ! "My meditation of him shall be sweet." Consider Christ in any way you please, and your meditation of him will be sweet. Jesus may be compared to some of those lenses you have perhaps seen, which you may take up, and hold in one way, and you see one light; you hold them in another way, and you see another light; and whichever way you turn them, you will always see some precious sparkling of light, and some new colours starting up to your view. Ah! take Jesus for the theme of your meditation, sit down and consider him, think of his relation to your own soul, and you will never get to the end of that one subject.

Think of his eternal relationship to you; recollect that the saints were from all condemnation free, in union with the Lamb, before the world was made. Think of your everlasting union with the person of Jehovah-Jesus before this planet was sent rolling through space, and recollect how your guilty soul was accounted spotless and clean even before you fell; and after that dire lapse, before you were restored, justification was imputed to you in the person of Jesus Christ. Think of your known and manifest relationship to him since you have been called by his grace. Think how he has become your Brother, how his heart has beaten in sympathy with yours, how he has kissed you with the kisses of his mouth, and his love has been to you sweeter than wine. Look back upon some happy, sunny spots in your history, where Jesus has whispered, "I am yours," and you have said, "My Beloved is mine." Think of some choice moments, when an angel has stooped from heaven, and taken you up on his wings, and carried you aloft, to sit in heavenly places where Jesus sits, that you might commune with him. Or

think, if it shall better please you, of some pensive moments, when you have had what Paul sets so much store by,—fellowship with Christ in his sufferings. Think of seasons when the sweat has rolled from your brow, almost as it did from that of Jesus,—yet not the sweat of blood,—when you have knelt down, and felt that you could die with Christ, even as you had risen with him. And then, when you have exhausted that portion of the subject, think of your relationship to Christ which is to be developed in heaven. Imagine the hour to have come when you shall—

> "Greet the blood-besprinkled band,
> On the eternal shore;"

and for ever range the—

> "Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
> Array'd in living green."

Picture to your mind that moment when Jesus Christ shall salute you as "more than a conqueror," and put a golden crown upon your head, more glittering than the stars. And think of that transporting hour when you will take that crown from off your brow, and climbing the steps of Jesus' throne, you shall put it on his head, and crown him once more Lord of your soul, as well as "Lord of all." Ah! if you come and tell me you have no subjects for meditation, I will answer,—Surely, you have not tried to meditate, or you would say with the psalmist, "My meditation of him shall be sweet."

Suppose you have done thinking of your Saviour as he is specially related to you, consider him, next, as he is related to the wide world. Recollect what Jesus said to Nicodemus, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved;" and, undoubtedly, he will one day save the world, for he who redeemed it by price and by power, will restore it, and renew it from the effects of the fall. Oh, think of Jesus in this relationship as the Repairer of the breach, the Restorer of paths to dwell in! He will come again to our earth one day; and when he comes, he will find this world still defaced with the old curse upon it,—the primeval curse of Eden. He will find plague, and pestilence, and war here still; but when he comes, he will bid men beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; war shall be obliterated from among the sciences; he shall give the Word, and there shall be a great company that will publish it; and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Jesus Christ shall come! Christians, be ye ever watching and waiting for the second coming of your Lord Jesus Christ; and whilst ye wait, meditate upon that coming. Think, O my soul, of that august day, when thou shalt see him with all his glorious train, coming to call the world to judgment, and to avenge himself upon his enemies! Think of all his triumphs when Satan shall be bound, and death shall be crushed, and hell shall be conquered, and when he shall be saluted as the universal Monarch, "God over all, blessed for ever. Amen." "My meditation of him shall be sweet."

I believe that, even when we get to heaven, we shall want no subject for meditation there, except Jesus Christ. There will be little else we shall want of heaven besides Jesus Christ. He will be our bread, our food, our beauty, and our glorious dress. The atmosphere of heaven will be Christ; everything in heaven will be Christ-like; yea, Christ is the heaven of his people. To be in Christ, and to be with Christ, is the essence of heaven.

"Not all the harps above
Can make a heavenly place,
Should Christ his residence remove,
Or but conceal his face."

III. Let me proceed to point out A VERY BLESSED RESULT: "My meditation of him shall be *sweet*."

This depends very much upon the character of the one who meditates. I know some persons, who come into chapel, and who are very glad when they hear the minister pronounce the benediction, and dismiss the assembly; they are very glad when all is over, and they would far rather hear the parting doxology than the text. As for a meditation on Christ, instead of saying it is sweet, they would say it is very dry. If they happen to hear an anecdote or a tale, they do not mind remembering that; but a meditation which should be entirely on Christ, would be dry enough to them, and they would be glad to hear it brought to a close. Ah! that is because of the taste you have in your mouth. There is something wrong about your palate. You have your mouth out of taste through eating some of the world's poor dainties; you have some of the powder of the apples of Sodom hanging on your lips, and that spoils the glorious flavour of your meditation on Jesus; in fact, it prevents your meditating on Christ at all. It is only a hearing of the meditation with your ears, not a receiving it with your hearts; but here the psalmist says, "My meditation of him shall be sweet."

What a mercy, dear friends, that there is something sweet in this world for us! We need it; I am sure, for, *as for most other things in the world, they are very, very bitter.* Go through the great laboratory of this world, and how many will be the cases that you will see marked bitter! There are perhaps more aloes put in our cup than any other ingredient. We have to take a great quantity of bitters in the course of our lives. What a mercy it is, then, that there is one thing that is sweet! "My meditation of *him* shall be sweet;" so sweet, beloved, that all the other bitters are quite swallowed up in its sweetness. Have I not seen the widow, when her husband has been called away, and he who was her strength, the stay and sustenance of her life, has been laid in the grave,—have I not seen her hold up her hands, and say, "Ah! though he is gone, still my Maker is my Husband; 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;' blessed be his holy name"? What was the reason of her patient submission to the will of God? Because she had a sweet meditation to neutralize the bitterness of her reflections. And do I not remember, even now, seeing a man, whose property had been washed away by the tide, and whose lands had been swallowed up,

and become quicksands, instead of being any longer profitable to him? Beggared and bankrupt, with streaming eyes, he held up his hands, and repeated Habakkuk's words: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Was it not because his meditation on Christ was so sweet, that it absorbed the bitterness of his trouble? And oh! how many, when they have come to the dark waters of death, have found that surely their bitterness was past, for they perceived that death was swallowed up in victory, through their meditation upon Jesus Christ!

Now, if any of you have come here with your mouths out of taste, through affliction and trouble, if you have been saying with Jeremiah, "He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes;" take a little of this choice cordial; I can assure you that it is sweet: *Lacrymæ Christi*, it is called. If thou wilt take these tears of Jesus, and put them in thy mouth, they will take away all the unpleasant flavour that is already there. Or, again, I bid you take this meditation upon Christ as a piece of scented stuff that was perfumed in heaven. It matters not what thou hast in thy house; this shall make it redolent of Paradise,—shall make it smell like those breezes that once blew through Eden's garden, wafting the odour of flowers. Ah! there is nothing that can so console your spirits, and relieve all your distresses and troubles, as the feeling that now you can meditate on the person of Jesus Christ. "My meditation of him shall be sweet."

But, my dear hearers, shall I dismiss you without asking you whether you have ever had a true meditation upon our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? I do not like to preach a sermon without pressing it home to the consciences of my hearers. I never like to bring you out a sword, and show it you, and say, "There is a sword, and it is sharp;" I always like to make you feel that it is sharp by cutting you with it. Would to God that the sword of the Spirit might penetrate many of your hearts now! When I see so many gathered together on a week-night, I am astonished. When I came to London, I did not fancy there would be half such a company on the Sabbath, much less on a week-day. But wherefore have ye come, my brethren? "What went ye out for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" What have ye come out for to see? A prophet? Nay, but I say that you have come to see something more than a prophet, you have come to see and hear somewhat of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Lord. How many of you meditate on Christ? Christian men and women, do not many of you live below your privileges? Are you not living without having choice moments of communion with your Saviour? Methinks, if you had a free pass to heaven's palace, you would use it very often; if you might go there whenever you liked, and hold communion

with some person whom you dearly loved, you would often be found there. But here is your blessed Lord Jesus, the King of heaven, and he gives you that which can admit you to intimate communion with him; and yet you live without meditating upon his work, meditating upon his person, meditating upon his offices, and meditating upon his glory.

Christian men and women! I ask myself, and I ask you, is it not time we should begin to live nearer to God? What is to become of our churches? I do not know what to think of Christendom at large. As I travel through the country, and go here and there, I see the churches in a most deplorable state. True, the gospel is preached in most places of worship; but it is preached as it might be by humble-bees in pitchers,—always with the same monotonous sound, and little or no good is done. I fear that the fault lies in the pews as well as in the pulpits. If hearers are meditative, preachers must be meditative. It is very true that water does not run up-hill; but when you hearers begin to meditate, and pray over the Word, your ministers will see that you have gone beyond them, and they will themselves meditate, and give you the gospel just as it comes fresh from their hearts, and it will be food for your souls.

And for the rest of you,—you who have never meditated on Jesus Christ,—what do you think will become of you when the bitterness of death's agony shall be in your mouth? When you taste death, how do you hope to destroy its ill flavour? Yet "that last, that bitterest cup which mortal man can taste" is but a dire foretaste of what is to follow. The first drops are bad enough, when you sip here the beginning of remorse on account of sin; but that future cup in hell,—that terrific mixture which God deals out to the lost in the pit,—what will you do when you have to drink that? What will you do when it will be your sad meditation that you rejected Jesus, that you despised his gospel, that you scoffed at his Word? What will you do in that dread extremity? You worldly business men, will your ledgers afford you a sweet meditation in hell? Ungodly lawyer, will it be sweet for you to meditate on your deeds and documents when you go there? Labouring man, will it be a sweet meditation to thee to think that thy wages were spent in drunkenness, or thy Sabbaths profaned, and thy soul neglected? And thou, mere professor, will it be a sweet meditation to thee to sit down, and think of thine hypocrisy? And, ah! ye carnally-minded men, who are indulging the flesh, and pampering the appetite, and not serving the Lord, whose god is your belly, and whose glory is in your shame, will your career furnish a sweet meditation to you at the last?

Be assured of this, my hearers, your sins must be your meditation then, if Christ is not your meditation now. O wicked men! wicked men! let me say my closing word to you, and to all who know not God. I will give you a subject for your meditation to-night; it shall be a parable. A certain tyrant sent for one of his subjects, and said to him, "What is your employment?" He answered, "I am a blacksmith." "Then go home," said he, "and make me a chain of such

a length." He went home; it occupied him several months, and he had no wages all the while he was making the chain, only the trouble and pains of making it. Then he brought it to the monarch, who said, "Go back, and make it twice as long." He gave him nothing to do it with, but sent him away. Again he worked on, and made it twice as long. He brought it up again, and the monarch said, "Go and make it longer still." Each time he brought it, there was nothing but the command to make it longer; and when he brought it up at last, the monarch said to his servants, "Take it, and bind him hand and foot with it, and cast him into a furnace of fire." There were his wages for making the chain. Here is a lesson which will afford you a subject for meditation to-night, ye who are servants of the devil. Your master is telling you to make a chain; some of you have been fifty years welding the links of that chain; and he says, "Go and make it longer still." Next Sunday morning, you will open that shop of yours, and put another link on; next Sunday night, you will be drunk, and put another link on; next Monday, you will do a dishonest action, and so you will keep on adding fresh links to this chain; and when you have lived twenty more years, the devil will say, "Add more links still!" And then, at last, his command will be, "Take him, and bind him hand and foot, and cast him into a furnace of fire." "For the wages of sin is death." There is a subject for your meditation. I do not think it will be sweet; but if God makes it profitable, it will do you good. You must have strong medicines sometimes, when your disease is bad. God apply this message to your hearts! Amen.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL."

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A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, July 31st, 1881.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."—2 Corinthians vii. 10.

MANY years ago, and indeed in some measure to a later date, preachers of the Word seemed mainly to dwell upon the inner experience of men. They both preached sermons and wrote books in which they set forth the condition of convinced sinners, describing what they usually felt before they found peace with God. They were very strict in their search for the genuine tokens of true repentance, and the internal evidences of regeneration. They preached continually upon the work of the Spirit of God in convincing sinners of their lost condition; but they were not accustomed to say to them so baldly and so boldly as we do now, "Believe, and live;" and the consequence was, that a large number of truly awakened persons were kept in bondage, and did not come into the liberty wherewith Christ makes believers free,—at least, not so soon as they do nowadays. I believe that, under God's blessing, those experimental preachers were the means of producing very sturdy Christians. They did a great deal of deep ploughing, with a very sharp ploughshare, before they began to sow the good seed of the kingdom. They took care to use the pointed needle of the law to make a way for the silken thread of the gospel, so that what they did sew was well sewn, and the garments which they made did not rend and tear quite so easily as much of the spiritual raiment does which is made in these days of more showy, but less substantial, labour.

Still, there was this defect about that style of preaching, it led men to look too much within instead of looking away from self to Christ. No matter how faithfully they proclaimed the grace of God, they preached some sort of preparation for the reception of that grace; and, therefore, sinners often looked to themselves to see whether they had that preparation rather than to the grace

which it was most desirable that they should seek. I believe you may say so much about the disease of sin that, instead of leading the sinner in despair to turn his gaze to Christ, as the bitten Israelites looked to the brazen serpent as the only remedy,—you may merely make him sit down, and study the disease, and look, and look, and look again for the various symptoms you have described; and though he will be well acquainted with the disease, he will not in that way find a cure for it. You may dive as far as you like into the sea, but you will not find any fire there; you may rake as long as you please in the burning fiery furnace, but you will never reach any cooling blocks of ice; you may hunt, for many a day, in the human heart's natural death, but you will not there discover any signs of life; and, within the charnel-house of man's corruption, you shall never be able to discern any remedy for a sin-sick soul. It was in that particular that the experimental preaching lacked an important element.

But, now, times have changed, and very many of us, who are ministers of the gospel, do very plainly proclaim to sinners the message, "Believe, and live." This plain declaration rings out from almost every part of our land,—not yet quite in every place, I would that it were so; but, still, there is a large company of Evangelical preachers continually repeating the apostolic message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." I am sure that much good must result from this proclamation of the truth, for this is God's ordained way of blessing the souls of men; and yet,—and yet,—I sometimes fear lest there should be all sowing and no ploughing;—lest there should be the preaching only of the remedy, with almost an entire ignoring of the disease;—and lest the message "Believe, and live," should take the place of that other great truth, "Ye must be born again." It will never do for men to be led to think that they are healed before they know that they are sick unto death, or to imagine that they are clothed before they see themselves to be naked, or to be taught to trust Christ before they are aware that they have anything for which they have need to trust him. It would be a happy circumstance if, in our preaching, we could have a blending of these two elements, so that we could have somewhat of our forefathers' deep experimental teaching, and with it, and growing out of it, a plain, unfettered delivery of the gospel declaration, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

"How are the two things to be reconciled?" someone asks. My dear brother, I have long ago given up trying to reconcile friends who never fell out. These two truths are both taught in Scripture, and therefore they cannot be at variance with one another. You would be as much puzzled to prove where they differ as I should be to show that they agree. I am confident that they do agree, because I find them both in the Book. Therefore, let them both be preached. Somehow, we are constantly coming across truths that lie side by side, like the metals on which the railway carriages run. If we only preach one of them, it will be like trying to run the train on a single rail. You know that there are often two truths, if not

three, closely connected with one another. I am frequently led to see that there is a trinity of truths as there is a Trinity in the Godhead; and if they are all preached, in due proportion, they will balance one another, and prevent any one truth from being too prominent. Luther, with his free justification, by faith, is apt to go too far unless there shall come in Calvin and Zwingle, with their balancing truths, to set him right. Even Paul's inspired words might have been the means of leading some men astray unless James had also been inspired to write on the practical side of truth so that Paul's meaning should be the better understood. There is nothing wrong in the teaching of either Paul or James; they are both right, the two together bring out both aspects of truth.

I am going to preach to-night about sorrow for sin. I hope it has not yet quite gone out of the world; I trust that sorrowful penitence does still exist, though I have not heard much about it lately. People seem to jump into faith very quickly nowadays. I do not disapprove of that happy leap; but, still, I hope my old friend repentance is not dead. I am desperately in love with repentance; it seems to me to be the twin-sister to faith. I do not myself understand much about dry-eyed faith; I know that I came to Christ by the way of Weeping-cross. I did not come to shelter beneath his blood immediately I heard of it, as I now wish that I had done; but when I did come to Calvary, by faith, it was with great weeping and supplication, confessing my transgressions, and desiring to find salvation in Jesus, and in Jesus only.

Now, concerning this sorrow for sin, I want, first, *to remove certain erroneous ideas with regard to it;* secondly, *to distinguish between the two sorrows mentioned in the text;* the godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation, and the sorrow of the world which worketh death; and then, thirdly, we will *indulge ourselves in sorrow for sin.* We will finish up with some happy sorrow, that blessed, godly sorrow which is never to be repented of or regretted.

I. First, then, I want to try to REMOVE CERTAIN ERRONEOUS IDEAS WITH REGARD TO SORROW FOR SIN.

Some persons seem to think *that mere sorrow of mind in reference to sin is repentance;* but it is not. Read the text, and you will at once see that it is not. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance." Therefore, it is not itself repentance. It is an agent employed in producing repentance, but it is not itself repentance. There is, in the world, a great deal of sorrow on account of sin which is certainly not repentance, and never leads to it. Some transgressors are sorry for sin for a time; they are convicted of guilt, with a transitory conviction, which soon passes away. Many are sorry for sin because of its temporal consequences; and many more because of its eternal consequences. They are afraid of hell. If there were no hell, they would like to continue to live in sin. They would be delighted if it could be proved that there is no God. Nothing would please them better than to have the law of the Lord and all its penal consequences abolished. They are as fond of sin as ever they were, but they sorrow because they see that it is bringing them down to the gulf of perdition. Now, that kind of

sorrow is not repentance. A moth may burn its wings in the candle, and then, full of pain, fly back to the flame. There is no repentance in the moth, though there is pain; and so, there is no repentance in some men, though there is in them a measure of sorrow on account of their sin. Do not, therefore, make a mistake in this matter, and think that sorrow for sin is, or even necessarily leads to, repentance.

Next, do not fall into the other mistake, and imagine *that there can be such a thing as repentance without sorrow for sin*, for there can never be such a thing. I heard a person say, and, as I thought, say very flippantly, that it was a great thing to know the Greek language because, in that way, you found out that repentance "simply meant a change of mind." The brother who said that did not appear to me to know much about the English language, and I was quite certain that he did not know *alpha* from *beta* in the Greek language; but that was what he said, "it simply meant a change of mind." Ah! it does mean a change of mind, but what a change of mind! In my opinion, such a translation of the Greek as that would not imply that repentance was anything less than it is commonly understood to be, but a far greater thing. It is an entire and total change of mind, a turning of the mind right round, so that it hates what once it loved, and loves what once it hated;—it forms different judgments from what it ever did before, and no longer puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; darkness for light, and light for darkness. It judges righteous judgment, for the change of mind is thorough and complete; and I therefore say that there is no repentance, that is worth anything, which is not accompanied by sorrow for sin.

Just think for a moment. Here is a man who says, "I repent." But are you really sorry that you sinned? "No," he replies. Then, my dear sir, you cannot have truly repented; for a man, who has not got even so far as repentance, is often sorry for having done wrong. When a man is convinced that he has transgressed against God he ought to be sorry; and if you tell me that there can be such a thing as spiritual repentance, and yet no sorrow for having broken the law of God, I tell you that you do not know what you are talking about. The thing is clearly, on the very face of it, impossible. There must be a deep hatred of the sin that you have committed, and even of the thought of ever committing that sin again. There must be sincere sorrow that ever you should have transgressed against God, and that you should be liable to transgress again. If there is no such sorrow as that in your heart, one of the things which are necessary to a genuine repentance is absent.

I have tried thus to correct two mistakes, but there is a third which I must point out to you. There are some persons who seem to think *that we must reach a certain point of wretchedness, or else we are not truly penitent.* They imagine that we must grieve up to a certain point of temperature, or we cannot be saved; and they watch the convicted sinner to see when he gets near to what they consider to be a sufficient measure of brokenness of heart. But there are different methods of measuring this state of the spirit; I

believe that some of our Hyper-Calvinistic brethren rigidly apply a very long measure indeed to all cases of this kind. I remember that one young friend, before whom I had set the gospel very simply, said to me, "But is that all I have to do? Have I only to believe in Christ in order that I may be saved? Why, my father was six months in trouble of soul before he could find the Saviour, and part of the time he was so bad that he had to be put in a lunatic asylum." Yes, that is the kind of notion some people have, —that there is a certain amount of alarm, distress, apprehension, and fear which a man has to feel before he is up to the mark in this respect; but there is nothing at all in the Word of God to support that idea.

I will not waste time by dwelling upon it, because it is altogether a baseless supposition. We admit that many, who come to Christ, have passed through very great terror and agony before doing so; but a large part of their suffering was the work of the devil, and not the work of the Spirit of God at all. A great part of it might have been spared if they had not been so ignorant, and a still larger part of it they might never have suffered if they had heard the gospel preached with greater simplicity, and had not been muddled and handled so roughly by some who put their own experience into the place of the Saviour. After all, we are not saved by any feelings or alarms that we may have. The source of eternal life is yonder, on that cross; and he who looks there, be he who he may or what he may, shall find salvation in the glance that spies out the wounded God. Not our wounds, but his wounds;—not our griefs, but his griefs;—not our tears, but his blood must save us. Away, therefore, for ever, with the notion that there is a certain point of grief that has to be reached to qualify us for coming to the Saviour.

Then, again, there is another mistake made by many.—*that this sorrow for sin only happens once*,—as a sort of squall, or a hurricane, or thunderstorm, that breaks over a man once, and then he is converted, and he talks about that experience all the rest of his life, but he has nothing more to do with it. Why, dear friends, there is nothing more erroneous than that. For myself, I freely confess that I have a very much greater sorrow for sin to-day than I had when I came to the Saviour more than thirty years ago. I hate sin much more intensely now than I did when I was under conviction; I am sure I do. There are some things that I did not know to be sin then, that I do know to be sin now, and therefore I strive to be rid of them. I have a much keener sense of the vileness of my own heart now than I had when first I came to Christ, and I think that many other believers here will say that it is the same with them. Sorrow for sin is a perpetual rain, a sweet, soft shower which, to a truly gracious man, lasts all his life long. He is always sorrowful that he has sinned. He is continually grieved that there should still be any sin remaining in him, and he will never leave off grieving till all that sin has gone. I could almost wish that, in heaven itself, the Lord would let me mourn that I ever did sin. Good old Rowland Hill used to say that the only thing about heaven that he did not quite like was that he should leave off re-

penting there, he supposed that no tear of sorrow for sin could be ever allowed to fall there. It is a sweet thing to be sorrowful for sin, to be sorrowful for impurity, to be sorrowful for anything that made Jesus sorrow; it is not a thing that happens once, and then is done with; the godly sorrow of a believer lasts throughout his life.

I want also to correct another mistake, namely, *that sorrow for sin is a miserable feeling.* The moment the word "sorrow" is mentioned, many people suppose that it must necessarily be grief of a bitter kind. Ah! but there is a sweet sorrow, a healthy sorrow. In honey, there is a sweetness that cloys after a while. We may eat too much of it, and make ourselves ill; but in repentance there is a bitter sweetness, or a sweet bitterness,—which shall I call it?—of which, the more you have, the better it is for you. I can truly say that I hardly know a diviner joy than to lay my head in my Heavenly Father's bosom, and to say, "Father, I have sinned, but thou hast forgiven me; and, oh, I do love thee!" It is such bliss, whenever you are troubled in heart, to go to God over again just as you went to him at the first, as a poor sinner, and to say, "Lord, I mourn to think that I should have been what I have been,—that I should have fallen so far short even of my own ideal of what I meant to have been; but I know that thou lovest me; and the more sure I am of the fact, and the more glad I am because of it, the more grieved I am to think that I do not live as such love as thine deserves that I should live."

What have you been doing that is wrong, brother? Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret sin that is keeping thee sad and sorrowful? Shall I help you to find out the source of the evil? Have you been neglecting the reading of the Word? Have you been lax in private prayer of late? Have you been getting covetous? As you have grown richer, have you grown tighter in the fist? Have you been getting more worldly? Do you speak less about Christ than you used to do, and more about vanity? Have you been mixing up in bad company? Have you been entangled by a so-called friend who is no help to you, but who really hinders you greatly in spiritual things? Have you been forming some associations that you know Christ does not approve of? Have you been letting things go a little amiss in your business,—only a little amiss? Still, you know that things are not straight, and that you could not face a thorough examination of your affairs. Have you fallen out with your brother, and can you not forgive him? Have you had a quarrel, you two sisters, and will you not love each other? Yet you call yourselves Christians! So I might go on to mention fifty other things, and any one of those things would be quite sufficient to take from you the joy of the Lord, and to bring you into a lean state spiritually. You know that you were once like the land of Egypt during her seven years of plenty, when all went well with you. I pray God that you may not have seven years of famine, as they had in Egypt, for it is wonderful how the lean kine will eat up the fat kine, and yet never be any the fatter themselves. One would have thought that, if the seven lean beasts ate up the seven fat ones, they would get fat themselves; but they

did not, and you may have a sad time of declension that will eat up all your years of zeal and holy joy; yet those years may not be one whit the better because of the strange feast. Come, brother; come, sister; you and I cannot afford to live at a distance from Christ. We cannot afford to live in a state of misery. A Christian who is not glad,—why, what sort of a Christian is he? I cannot bear to see religion served up with vinegar. No, brethren; it ought to be sweet in itself,—so sweet that, if you poured a cask of vinegar on it, you would not make it sour. A Christian ought to be a happy man. He is not true to his colours,—he is not true to his Master,—he is not true to himself,—unless he is a happy man. Let us have a good drink of the "wines on the less, well refined," till we forget our misery, and remember it no more in the ecstatic joy and intense delight which the love of Christ and communion with God shall give us over again. If you have backslidden, come back this very hour; confess your sin in backsliding from God, and Christ will soon give you back your old joy and gladness.

It does not spoil your happiness, my brother or sister, to confess your sin; the unhappiness is in not making the confession. If you are a child, and you have done something wrong towards your father, you are unhappy as long as you try to conceal it. You old folks can recollect that, when you were boys at home, and you had been doing wrong, you sometimes said, "I shall not own it;" but all the while that you hardened yourself, you were miserable, you know that you were. You missed your father's good-night kiss and your mother's smile; and although, as long as you stubbornly held out you thought yourself very brave, yet you were very miserable. But did you not also know what it was, afterwards, to go and say, "Father," or "Mother, I was very wrong to do what I did, and I am truly sorry"? Then, as you received the kiss of full forgiveness, I do not suppose you ever felt more happy than after that in all your life. That is the way for God's child always to do. Whenever you have done wrong, go at once to your Heavenly Father, with godly sorrow for that sin, and get over again the sweet kiss of his forgiving love; that is not wretchedness, it is happiness of the highest kind. It is the safest and surest way to maintain communion with God that I know of; unless, indeed, it be true, as some of our friends say, that they live without sinning altogether; about which I will say no more just now.

There are some who also erroneously think *that sorrow for sin must be mixed with unbelief*. They suppose that, if a man is sorrowful for sin, he must be afraid that he will be lost, he must fear that his sin can never be forgiven him. Permit me, however, to explain that no such black cloud as that need follow upon the heels of our repentance. The best sorrow for sin is that which never doubts Christ's ability to wash it out,—that cries out in grief for having sinned, and yet says, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." It is not right, on the part of your child, if he comes, and says, "Father, I have done wrong, and I do not believe you will ever forgive me." Why, he is wrong all over, then, is he not? You can see the evil that is in his heart boiling over in such talk as

that. But there is no need for it to be so with you, my brother or sister; rather say, "My Father, I have sinned, and I mourn that I have done so; but, at the same time, I not only know that thou wilt forgive, but I know that thou hast forgiven me, for Christ's sake. I have laid my hands upon the head of the great Sacrifice and Substitute; and I know that, ere I was born, in his own person he carried my sin away, even as of old the scapegoat carried the sin of Israel into the wilderness, and it is gone for ever, for thou hast said, 'The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.' Lord, I trust to the substitutionary sacrifice offered by thy dear Son, and I feel at perfect peace with thee; and, for that very reason, I hate sin more than ever I did, and I grieve, more than ever I did in my life before, to think I should ever have been guilty of it."

Thus have I tried to remove a few erroneous ideas out of the way; yet I fear that they will continue to deceive many as long as the world stands.

II. Now, secondly, I want to help you to DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE TWO SORROWS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT. First, there is *a godly sorrow, which "worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of."* If you have marginal notes in your Bibles, you will see that, in the preceding verse, where we read, "ye were made sorry after a godly manner," in the margin it reads, "ye were made sorry according to God;" and that rendering lets a great deal of light into the meaning of our text: "sorrow according to God."

Now, mark, the true sorrow which we ought to have, and which saves men instrumentally, is sorrow on account of sin because it is sin against God. That is the very pith of godly sorrow, as penitent David cried, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight;" and as the prodigal said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight." O my dear hearers, do ask yourselves whether you have sorrowed for sin because it is sin against God; for any hypocrite is sorry for sin which injures himself, or which may damage his reputation among men; but the essential thing is to be sorry because the evil is a wrong done to God. You know that men do not generally trouble much about wrong done to God. A crime is usually a wrong done to man, so we think it is a horrible thing; but a sin, inasmuch as it is against God, many people do not care at all about that. If I were to personally address any man or woman in this place, and say, "You are a sinner," each one would reply, "Yes, that is true;" but if I were to say to a man, "You are a criminal," he would be ready to knock me down. So, you see, a criminal is one who offends against men, and that is, in our view, a very horrible thing; but a sinner being only one who offends against God, that is not, according to most people's notion, anything in particular, so they do not care much about it. Oh, but when a man is really awakened, he sees that the gravamen of the offence is that it is an offence against God; that is the worst part of the offence, as he rightly judges, and he therefore sorrows over it. This is a sorrow which is to be cultivated by us, the mourning over sin because it is committed against God.

Then, notice, that it is also a sorrow which is associated with a believing faith, for a godly sorrow must be one that makes the heart that feels it yield itself to Christ. Yielding itself to Christ, it must believe in Christ; for, if I do not believe in Christ, it is certain that I have not yielded myself to him. Therefore, the only sorrow for sin that is worth having is that which brings me to yield myself up to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to accept God's mercy in God's own way. If you have any sort of sorrow for sin, which does not lead you to believe in Christ, away with it! Away with it! A repentance, that does not repent at the cross, is a repentance which will have to be repented of; but true sorrow for sin must be blended with a childlike submission to God, and consequent confidence in Christ; otherwise, it is not "godly sorrow."

"Godly sorrow" is, next, known by its leading to repentance. It "worketh repentance"—"a change of mind" about everything, and especially about sin. A man is so sorry for having done wrong that he thinks differently now of all wrong-doing. He thinks differently of his entire life; and his mind is made up, God helping him, to live just the opposite way to that in which he has formerly lived. When sorrow for sin leads to that result, we may be quite sure that it is the work of the Spirit of God, and that it is acceptable in his sight.

It leads on also to deliverance from sin, for the text says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation." Now, what is salvation? Some people think that it means being saved from going down to hell. That is the result of salvation; but salvation means being saved from the power of sin, and being saved from the tendency to sin, as well as being saved from the punishment of sin. That is a blessed sorrow which leads us to such a change of mind that the bonds of sin are snapped, and we become free men in Christ Jesus, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation from the bondage and the power of sin and Satan.

That is the kind of sorrow to cultivate, for it leads to perpetual perseverance in the ways of God. Notice that the text says it is a salvation not to be repented of; or, if you like, a repentance not to be repented of. I have known men repent after a fashion, and they have been very sorry for it afterwards. I knew a wild sort of fellow who was brought to his knees at the penitent-form, and he did cry away at a fine rate; but you could never get him inside that place again. He was always ashamed of himself, for it was a repentance that needed to be repented of, and he did repent of it. There is many a dog that gets back to his vomit as soon as he can, and there is many a sow that is sorry for being washed, and glad enough to get back again to wallow in the mire. But that is not the kind of change that the apostle mentions here. True godly sorrow is that which leads to repentance never to be repented of, for the man says, "No, I left my sin; and if I wanted to go back to it, I have plenty of opportunity to do so; but I cannot go back to it, I hate it. There," says he, "I have been tempted over and over again, and my feet had well-nigh slipped; but the eternal life within me, kept there by the Spirit of God, has driven me back to Christ. I

could not do this great wickedness, and sin against God. I have smarted too much already to put my hand again into the fire. I grieved my God too much, and brought too much grief upon my own heart, for me again to play the fool, and once more to go into the purlieus of iniquity." Happy is that man who has had enough of the smart of sin to make it sour and bitter to him all the rest of his days; so that now, with changed heart, and renewed spirit, he perseveres in the ways of God, never thinking of going back, but resolved "through floods or flames" to force his way to heaven, to be, by divine grace, master over every sin that assails him. That is the kind of sorrow which I pray that God may work in everyone here who has never yet felt it.

III. Now, to close, let us pray God the Holy Spirit to enable us to INDULGE OURSELVES IN GODLY SORROW FOR SIN.

I will not say anything about the sorrow of the world, that worketh death, but leave that sad subject in order that we may devote just this little space that remains to the enjoyment of godly sorrow for sin.

Remember, beloved, that *it is all forgiven now.* Our sin is all gone; it will never be mentioned against us any more for ever. The depths of the ocean of oblivion have covered the Egyptians of our sins, there is not one of them left. Therefore, "sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." The Red Sea waves of the Redeemer's blood have rolled over all our sins; they sank to the bottom like a stone. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." That is, they are removed to an infinite distance, from which they can never be brought back again. They are gone; they are all gone, and gone for ever.

And now, beloved, let us ask ourselves,—*how could we have sinned against such a forgiving God?* If we had known how readily he would forgive us, surely we could not have offended him as we have done. Such a God as he is,—was there ever any like unto him? Well might the prophet Micah exclaim, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" O God, how could I ever have offended against thee? Having done so, how could I continue to rebel against thee all those long years? How could I resist the yearnings of thy love, and the entreaties of thy Spirit? Oh, why did I linger so long before coming back to such a Father, who clasped me to his heart, and kissed away all my transgressions, and said, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." Burst forth into tears, O eyes that have so long been dry! O hearts that have been like the rock in the desert, let the sweet love of God strike you, like the rod of Moses, and let the waters leap forth. The thought that we have sinned against such a God, may well cause us godly sorrow.

And, then, we should further sorrow as we remember that *our pardon has come to us through Jesus Christ.* Yet it was against him that we sinned,—against him who, for our sakes, left the thrones and royalties of heaven, and was born a babe at Bethlehem;—

against him, who sat weary on the well at Sychar, and said, "Give me to drink," yet to whom we refused to give the water of our heart's love. Think, brethren and sisters, that you and I have sinned against him who said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." We have sinned against him who never did us any wrong, never did us an ill turn, or said a hard word to us; but who, blessed be his infinite love, went up to the cross for us, and gave his hands to the cruel nails, and his whole body to death, that he might redeem us from our sins, and save us for ever. O Jesus, my Saviour, against thee have I offended! O strong Son of God, Incarnate Deity, whom, though we have not seen, we do by faith unceasingly adore, it is against thee we have offended. We have sinned against him to whom we are married for ever,—against him who is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;—against him, the kisses of whose mouth are sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. O my heart, thou mightest well break, though thou wert made of cast steel, to think that thou hast rebelled against him who is all goodness and all love to thee!

I tell you, dear friends, one thing that always makes me grieve to think that I have sinned, and that is *my election*. Oh, when I first knew that God had chosen me to be his from before the foundation of the world, I could not make out how I could have been so mad as to have lived without him,—to have lived in opposition to him. And then, when I found that Christ had graven me, even me, upon the palms of his hands, and written my name upon his heart, then I smote upon my breast, and said, "Woe is me that I, a man so much beloved, should, nevertheless, have been such a transgressor, and have sinned so grievously against my God!"

Come, brothers and sisters, plunge with me into this pool of holy sorrow. Well you may, for think how some of you have been favoured by sovereign grace! Think how God called you out of the depths of sin;—how long and how patiently he bore with you! Some of you were converted when you were sixty or seventy years old; can you ever love him enough, and can you ever grieve enough because you lived so long in sin? And you who were converted when you were but boys and girls, can you ever bless him enough for calling you so early? Can you ever blame yourself enough for not loving him more, and not serving him better?

As for me, I am the worst and the lowest among you all, because I owe more to God's grace than anyone else in this place. To have this sweet privilege of talking about his love, why, I would not change places with Gabriel himself, for he, at any rate, has never had the privilege of telling such a story of redeeming grace and dying love as I have to tell. Yet I am ashamed of myself for speaking so coldly and so feebly concerning my blessed Saviour. I could almost fly from my pulpit because I cannot better speak of him, and move your hearts more earnestly to hate your sin. But so it is; the more mercy we have received, the more sorrow for sin should we feel; the more love, the more delight and rapture we have experienced, the more lamentation should we make that ever we should

have sinned, and that we should be so prone to sin again even after we have been forgiven. I often have to cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Some people tell me that Paul wrote that lament before he was converted, or when he was just converted, and they talk about rising above all such experiences as that; but I find that, the nearer I get to God, the more is my experience just like that of the apostle when he wrote those words; and whereas I only knew that I had so much sin when I had a clear view of God, and a strong sense of being his, yet it is then that I have learnt how terrible it is that there should still be the possibility of sin hanging about me, and I have cried, "Oh, that I were delivered from this body of death that still drags me down to the dust!"

I am sure it will be the same with you, beloved. The more your joy in the Lord, and the nearer you come to perfection, the deeper will be your lamentation,—the bitterer, yet in some senses the sweeter will be your sorrow that there should be any sin still remaining within you. I say again, this is sweet sorrowing,—sweet, sweet sorrow; and, till you get to heaven, I could scarcely wish you any better joy than this,—to go home, and creep to the cross-foot, and lie there, sorrowing over your sin against such a Saviour, yet rejoicing that it is all forgiven.

"He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;"—

so, as you lie there, look up,—

"And view the flowing
Of the Saviour's precious blood,
With divine assurance knowing
He hath made your peace with God."

And then say,—

"My sins, my sins, my Saviour,
Their guilt I never knew"—

"till I knew what they cost thee,—till I knew thy great love to me,—till I knew my sins were all forgiven; but now they are forgiven, they torture me with a sweet grief whereof I fain would die."

"Lord, let me weep for nought but sin,
And after none but thee;
And then I would—oh, that I might!
A constant weeper be."

This is joy, rest, patience, bliss, just to lie there, and weep, and wash with tears the feet that came upon that errand of love and mercy for us, and still look, and love, and long, and weep, and look, and love, and long, and weep again, and kiss again and again the blessed feet of him who hath redeemed us unto God by his blood. The Lord keep us there, dear friends! Amen. Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—555, 69, 580.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CHURCH INCREASE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, August 18th, 1881.

"The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?"—Isaiah xlix. 20, 21.

MEN who have no grace in their hearts despise the Church of God. Those who have only a little grace have but slight sympathy with her condition. Men who have great grace, and are conscious of having received much mercy from God, have great sympathy with the Church of God, and a deep regard for her. You remember how David, in that memorable penitential Psalm, the 51st, after he had poured out his whole soul in pleading for mercy and forgiveness for himself, concluded his prayer by saying, "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem." In like manner, those who have needed mercy, and have pleaded for mercy, and have received much mercy, are usually those who are most anxious that the people of God should be happy, that the cause of God should prosper, that the truth of God should speedily overthrow error, and that the Christ of God should be exalted and glorified in the earth.

I do not expect to say anything upon this subject which will interest those who have no love for the Church of God; but those who belong to her, and who are spending their lives to promote her welfare because she is the bride of Christ, will, I trust, find something in what I say which will interest and perhaps encourage them. I shall come at once to the text, and notice that, first, *we must expect a measure of decrease in the Church;* but then, secondly, *we may expect a great increase in the Church;* and, thirdly, from what this text has to say upon that subject, and for other reasons also, *we ought to be encouraged to seek the increase of the Church of God.*

I. First, then, dear friends, THERE IS A DECREASE GOING ON IN THE CHURCH OF GOD ON EARTH.

Zion is represented here as mourning for the children that she had lost. The Jewish Church in the olden times saw her sons and daughters slain with the sword, or carried away captive. Afterwards, she saw the great majority of the nation refusing Christ, and turning away from him, and thus the Jewish Church was minished and brought very low. The same thing has happened in many other cases, and I am going to apply the text to ourselves and our own churches. We must naturally expect to see, in each separate church of Jesus Christ, a certain process and measure of decrease.

For, first, *some are being drafted from us to supply the choirs of heaven with fresh minstrelsy.* That is a happy source of loss which we would not stop if we could. Peradventure, in the case of each sheaf that is gathered into the heavenly garner, there are some who would fain detain it, to the loss of that particular sheaf, and also to the loss of the great Husbandman. When we speak as we ought concerning those who are thus taken home, we thank God that, when the shocks of corn are fully ripe, they are no longer left in the field to suffer through the falling showers or the blighting mildew, but they are carried away to their proper place in the garner of God.

Therefore, beloved, bury not the saints with dolorous music, but sing psalms of praise as you bear them to the grave. I like the old Puritan style of funeral, when the body of the believer was borne to the tomb upon men's shoulders, and the surviving friends sang psalms and hymns as they marched along. Their faith taught them that they had no need to sorrow as those that are without hope, so they took care always to mingle the music of a joyful faith with the tears that they shed over the departure of those who had fallen asleep in Christ. So let it always be with us. As star by star descends below the horizon of earth, it shines far more brightly in the skies above. Should not Jesus have his own? Is it not still his prayer, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory"? Should we wish to detain them from their Lord's embrace, or rob the Master of the satisfaction of receiving home his loved ones? No; certainly not. That source of decrease has taken away lately some of the godliest and most gracious of ministers. Some of the officers of the church, who seemed to be its pillars, have been removed; and others, less known, but equally gracious, have also been missed from our midst. So must it continue to be; therefore, let us not rebel against the blessed necessity. Who among us would wish to alter the Lord's arrangement? No; let this form of decrease still go on, and let the Church on earth be the nursery for the Church above; let it be the school, the place of education, the training-ground, until the children shall come of age, and enter upon their inheritance fully prepared to enjoy it to the praise and glory of their Lord.

Each separate church will also have a measure of decrease *through the removal of God's servants from one place to another.* This is a circumstance which is sometimes much regretted, but I think it should not be so. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Often, the removal of a Christian out

of a particular place is in order that he may be more helpful to another community than he is in his present position. I have frequently seen brethren, who were just ordinary members of this church, good, useful people, but they did not attain to any very great prominence; yet, in another place, they have been exceedingly useful. I go into the country to preach, and the deacon shakes hands with me, and as I look at him, I say, "Ah! I recollect you." "Well, sir," he replies, "I moved away from London, some years ago, and the Lord has been pleased to put me here, so that I may help this little cause. It has been strengthened, I hope, by my coming;" and I find the brother greatly developed by being transplanted. He is where the trees do not stand so thickly together as they do here, and he grows all the better for the change. Sometimes, under the shadow of some great tree, there is a large number of saplings, and they grow there pretty well. But, by-and-by, the big tree is cut down; and it is not altogether a loss, for then the minor trees, that were beneath it, begin to develop, and to become strong forest trees themselves. So is it, sometimes, that men are overshadowed in one position, and their removal is for their own development. On the whole, it is a gain to the Church of God for certain churches to lose some of their members. Do not, therefore, always regret this source of decrease. For my part, I thank God for the many whom we lose by emigration. I am glad that some friends have gone to America. What would the United States have been, at this moment, if it had not been for "the men of the *Mayflower*" in the olden times, and the many pilgrim fathers and pilgrim sons who have since gone across the Atlantic to be as salt in that part of the earth? Look still further away to Australia, so largely peopled by those who are of our race. What a mercy that it is so! Would you have those lands given up to Romanism, or to Mohammedanism, or to Paganism? God forbid! Salt ought not to be kept in a box; it is meant to be rubbed into the meat, and Christians are intended to be scattered all over the carcase of this world, to salt it all, and act with purifying and preserving power in every place. Let not the members of any one church, therefore, sit down, and sigh, and cry, because their fellow-members are removed. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, so try to catch some more. If your brethren and sisters are gone where they can be more useful, God speed them! Freely and cheerfully let them go. A heart that should try to keep all the blood within itself would be no source of life to the body; nay, it could not itself live; but the heart that continually pumps in the blood and then pumps it out again, is the one that is serving its proper purpose. That is how churches should do; let them not be parsimonious, but rather prodigal in the cause of God. Depend upon it that, if we decrease in numbers because our friends depart to other spheres of service for the Saviour, it is not a thing to weep over. We must try to get in some new members to take their places, and may God prosper the endeavour!

But there is another source of decrease over which we must greatly grieve, and that is, *the backsliding of many professors.*

Over this decrease I mourn even more than over another, grievous as that is, namely, *the sifting process by which the chaff is removed from the wheat.* For, when the saints backslide, they are still God's people, although their power for good, their influence, their help to the Church of God is gone until they are brought back, and that is very lamentable. Churches lose much, if not in number, yet certainly in strength, in fervour, in power of prayer, by the declining in grace of some who once did run well, but who have been hindered. Pray much, dear friends, that God would keep all who are members with us from growing cold. May they have their first love restored, if it is at all declining; and may they have much more than that, for it is little to keep just as we were when we were spiritually made alive! We ought to "grow in grace." Our first love should be like the kindling of the fire when, perhaps, there are shavings or straw set alight, and it burns apparently more fiercely than it does afterwards; yet, later on in the Christian life, there ought to be a steady flame like the glow of the coals when they are turned in the grate to one solid ruby. That steady glow of permanent love to the Lord Jesus Christ is what we should seek after; but we do not see it in some of our fellow-members. Then, by-and-by, they cease their attendance at the communion, and they are missing from various forms of Christian work and service, and so the church has non-efficient members, and thus it has to regret a real decrease.

As for that other decrease over which we mourn,—the sifting by which the chaff is separated from the wheat,—how sadly true it still is, as the beloved apostle wrote, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." There is a separating process always going on in the professing church, and the most effectual fan of all is a faithful ministry. After a while, some of our hearers do not like what we say; it is too personal, too cutting, too searching. They want to listen to that kind of preaching which will allow them to go on comfortably in their sins, and to keep up a name to live even while they are dead. How constantly our Lord's teaching kept on sifting his disciples! After one of his utterances concerning human inability apart from divine grace, we read, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." As he continually brought out some of the deeper truths as his disciples were able to bear them, there were certain of the mixed multitude that had joined with his followers who went off this way and that way. So is it ever, and so must it be, under the faithful preaching of the Word; and you must not be astonished or grieved when it is so. It is a gain to any church to lose such members as these, for the mixed multitude usually falls a-lusting as it did in the olden time. Half the sin in the camp in the wilderness came not from the children of Israel, but from the riff-raff and rabble that went up out of Egypt with them, and that were mingled among them to their hurt.

Do not you, dear friends, ever believe that the true saints of

God can finally turn away from him, and be lost. There was a notable sermon preached, last Sunday, in St. Paul's Cathedral, against the perseverance of the saints. Did you notice why it was preached, and the whole tone and tenor of it? It was this. If the saints shall finally persevere, why, then, we do not need "the sacraments." Ah, that is the great secret! Calvinism is the death of priestcraft; Calvinism is the end of Sacramentalism; and, hence, "sacraments" must be cried up, and God's everlasting love is to be proved to be mutable, and the covenant to be founded on an "if" and an "an", and the Christ of God is, after all, to be just a toy for "priests" to play with! The preacher, perhaps unintentionally, let the cat out of the bag; "the sacraments" must be cried up, "the priests" must be kept up, and everything else must go; but we do not believe any such teaching as that. We still hold to it that, when Christ gives to his sheep eternal life, they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hands. Yet there are some that come in among his sheep that are only goats or wolves in sheep's clothing; and, after a time, these depart, and the church thus apparently decreases. But so it must be to the end, even as Judas went to his own place, yet the apostles did not really lose by his departure, they were rather the gainers thereby; and as those who are not true converts go out from her, the church need not lament except for their sakes,—certainly, not for her own.

I have brought this subject forward because I may be addressing some brethren who see the tide running out in their churches, and they are very sad as they watch the ebb. I have not seen much of that sort of thing myself, but the least ebb troubles me, and I go before God in prayer about it. I cannot bear really to lose one of the members of my church, or to see one of them turn aside from the company of the faithful. Yet there is another side to this picture, and we must not shut our eyes to it.

II. So I ask you now to consider with me the second part of our subject; that is, THERE IS AN INCREASE TO BE EXPECTED IN THE CHURCH OF GOD. There are new converts yet to come in, as says my text,—these children which Zion is to have, after she has lost the others.

And, brethren, *these new converts are needful.* No church can be healthy without the constant infusion of fresh blood. Unless there are new converts, you cannot see the church built up. They often help to keep the old members warm and zealous. How I like, at a prayer-meeting, to hear a brother pray for the first time; and I am not greatly grieved even if he breaks down, for it is the best kind of praying in the world when a man breaks down. Such an incident puts a sense of reality into the whole meeting. Our good old friends, who could not break down, but must inevitably run on till the winding was all worked out, were not always the most edifying to us. But those who, from very passion of earnestness, cannot find words in which to express their feelings, and so come to a pause with a sigh or groan, or a flood of tears, often do us the most good. The young converts are also quick in inventing new ways of usefulness, and they venture to do things which some consider "imprudent." Oh, how I love that word "imprudent" in

such a connection! I like "imprudent" young people. The more "imprudent" they are, in the cause of God, in the judgment of stolid, cold-hearted professors, the more I rejoice in them; for imprudence which believes in God, and dares to do exploits in his strength, is far preferable to that prudence which has no faith, and is therefore a poor, dead, useless thing.

So you see that the church needs new converts; and, therefore, *she ought to have every preparation for their reception.* There should always be an arrangement in every church to afford a welcome to the coming ones. Everything should be in readiness for the reception of the newborn converts. They should scarcely have to ask for admission; and, certainly, as soon as they come, they should see that it is the church's joy to welcome them. Hence we should always be on the look-out for them; we ought to look for new converts every Sunday. I do not think any sermon ought to be preached without each one of you Christian people saying, "I wonder whether God has blessed the message to this stranger who has been sitting next to me. I will put a gentle question to him, and see if I can find out." I have known some hearers to be annoyed at such a question being put to them by an earnest brother. Do not be annoyed, dear friend, if you can help it, because you are very likely to be treated in that way again. It is our custom to do it here, so you will have to put up with it; and the only way to get over the annoyance is to give your heart to Christ, and settle the matter once for all. Then, the next time you come here, you will not be asked the question because they will know who you are, for they will recognize your happy face; or if anyone else should ask you the question, you will give such a glad answer to it that you two will rejoice together.

We expect people to be converted when they come here. So much is this the case that I know a friend, who came to take a sitting,—I will not point it out, but I know just where he is now occupying it;—and he said that he must see me before he took the sitting. He said, "I understand that, if I take a sitting here, you will expect me to be converted." I said, "Oh, yes! I do expect that." "Well," he replied, "I cannot guarantee that." "No, my good man," I answered, "I know you cannot; but you use the word 'expect' in a different sense from what I do. I hope you will be converted through coming here; that is what I mean." "Oh!" he said, "I hope so, too;" and that is just what did happen. When people come to the house of God, and they expect to be saved, and we expect it, too, it is tolerably certain that they will be converted before long. We may rejoice and bless God if you live in an atmosphere of holy expectancy. Where the great door stands wide open for the prodigal son to come back, where all in the house are on the watch for his return, where they keep on sending letters to him to ask him to come home, is there not a good hope that such a wanderer will indeed return, and that the great Father will be made glad?

Churches need converts, and they should be on the look-out for them, and *all who love the Lord should labour earnestly on their*

behalf. All of us, who believe in Jesus, should seek, as God helps us according to our individual talent, to bring others to the dear Saviour's feet. If we do this, we shall often be made to recollect that all true conversion comes from God alone. There is no possibility of converting anybody by persuasion, by logic, by rhetoric, or anything of the sort. It is the work of God, and the work of God alone; and though he uses instrumentality in almost every case, yet he will not use that instrumentality which thinks itself sufficient for the work. He will make us know that we are nothing, and then he will make everything of us. He does not mind how much he makes of his servants when all that he does for them brings the more glory to his own name, and they do not, even with their little finger, touch the honour of it, or wish to do so.

When we come to that point, and we are all pleading and labouring for an increase to the church, it will come; and when it comes, it is probable that *we shall be astonished at the number of those that come:* "The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell;" or, to quote another text, the church shall say, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" I wish I could put it into the heads of some Christian people that, when there are large additions to a church, the new members are not necessarily at all inferior to those who come in by slow degrees, and in small numbers. My own solemn impression is, that it is more probably a work of God in conversion when there are many than when there are but few. For, look, when there are few converts, the tendency of human nature is to encourage as many as possible to come forward; and, in the process, to bring some who, if more caution had been used, and more true judgment exercised, might have been bidden to stand back for a while. The tendency of the minister, and of everybody else, is to try to bring in some when but few are being converted; and the probability is that they will not all of them prove to be true Christians. But when there are a great many candidates coming forward, I can vouch for it that we become even more earnest than usual not to receive any but those who are, so far as we can judge, truly converted. Every elder is doubly watchful at such a time; and everybody tries, if possible, to prevent an enthusiasm which might deceive people into the notion of their being Christians when they are not. We feel that we can afford, as it were, to use many sieves and strainers, many tests, by which to try whether they really are the children of God or not,—whether they are resolved and determined that they will follow Christ at all hazards.

I say not this as though I would depreciate the work of God in the conversion of ones, and twos, and threes. No, no; I bless God for them; but I want to make it clear that, when great numbers of converts come, it is wrong of people, for that reason, to think that it is not the work of God. I should, on the contrary, conclude that it is the work of God when many are saved at one time. If Peter, when he preached on the day of Pentecost, had been the means of

the conversion of half-a-dozen of his hearers, it would have been a thing for which to praise God, and no one ought to have suspected the genuineness of the half dozen; but, as Peter's ministry was blessed of God to three thousand, there was not any the more reason to say that there was one too many. Recollect, also, dear friends, that they were all baptized before night, and the whole of the three thousand were received into the church that same day. Many critics might have said, "Oh, dear! there is far too much excitement." Are you afraid of excitement, brother? You have excitement in political affairs, you have excitement in business matters, you have excitement in your family. What excitement there was in your house when but one little stranger came there; and shall there be no excitement in the Church of God when souls are born there? Why, surely we may be permitted to share in a divine excitement, for there is an excitement in heaven. Our Lord Jesus has told us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." There was considerable excitement when the prodigal son came home; it was so great that they killed the fatted calf, and had a festival of joy; there was holy merriment in the house, it was the scene of intense excitement; and I think, within reasonable bounds, within such bounds as true reason would dictate, from the great events that are happening,—for the conversion of a soul is the grandest event in human history next to the redemption,—there must be a blessed excitement among the people of God.

Dear friends, expect great numbers of sinners to be converted by the proclamation of the gospel. I remember praying, when I went to preach in the great shed at Bedford, belonging to Mr. Howard, the plough-maker, that God would be pleased to bring at least some few souls to himself by that service. Dear old Mr. Howard, a Wesleyan friend, who has since gone home to heaven, kept on saying. "Amen, Amen, Amen" while I was praying; but he did not say "Amen" to that particular petition. When I went home to the house, he said to me, "I joined with you in all your prayer except when you asked that God would at least convert a few people. Why, my dear friend," said he, "did you not pray that God would convert every soul there?" I said, "I will to-night, Mr. Howard. I am rebuked by what you have said." We do not ask enough of God. Open your mouth wide, and he will fill it. Oh, that we would open our mouths wide in large requests to God that he would bring in the converts by hundreds of thousands to the glory of his holy name!

The next thing that was a subject for astonishment to Zion was, *how those converts came to be born at all.* She enquired, in the language of the text, "Who hath begotten me these?" The reason was that she did not feel as if she had any power to bring forth all these. "Why," said she, "I have been in a truly sad state. 'I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro.' How did it ever happen that all these should be my children?" Ah, brethren! sometimes we ask the same question. Yesterday, I had a joy-day; all the bells of my heart did ring.

While many of you have been away at the seaside, I thought there was a little difference in the numbers coming to hear; and when I sat to see enquirers, there did not seem to be quite so many as usual coming forward, and I was troubled about it; but I came yesterday, and I had so many sheaves that the cart was loaded with them, and my helpers came to me, every now and then, and said, "What a joyful day!" I do not know whether all the friends whom I saw yesterday are here, but they delighted my soul with the stories they told me of what the grace of God had done for them. I bless God and take courage as I see another great slice cut out of devildom, and transferred to the kingdom of Christ. Quite a number of people, who had never known the Lord, or anything about him,—outsiders altogether,—had dropped in here, and heard the Word, and found Christ; and they kept on coming, hour after hour, till I was weary with the blessed task of speaking to them one by one about their souls. And as I went home I kept saying to myself, "How has all this come about?" because I have often felt so dull and heavy when I have been preaching. "Who hath begotten me these?"

And, dear friends, if God blesses you in your Sunday-school classes, you also will say, "However has this come about? What could I have said that could have brought my scholars to Christ?" If the Lord shall bless you much, my dear brother, in your preaching, you will more and more marvel that ever he should use such a poor tool as you are. I do not mean that you are a worse tool than I am, for I feel that I am a still poorer instrument than you are; but I often wonder that God uses me as he does, and I think you will also marvel that he uses you. When the church has grown feeble, when she has seemed to have no hope that God should bless her, and he then comes and visits her, and a multitude of converts is suddenly brought forth, she may well say, "Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro?" Take comfort then, beloved, from the fact that, whatever the decreases in the church may be, we may also expect increase; but in their number, the converts will surprise us; and in their being converted at all, we shall greatly marvel.

But what Zion wondered at next was, *how they had been nurtured*, for she says, "Who hath brought up these?" They were not merely born, but they had been brought up; and we also meet with persons, who come forward to tell us that they are converted to Christ; and they are by no means fools. Nay; but when we begin to question them concerning the things of God, they answer us sensibly and intelligently. They do not need us to lead them like little children, and to put the words into their mouth, for they know what to say; yet some of them have only been converted about a month, and they have not been used to hearing the gospel; but since they have heard it, they seem to have sucked it in like Gideon's fleece drank in the dew. Many doctors of divinity make a dreadful muddle of their theology, but these dear converts are as clear as possible upon what they believe; they have it all at their fingers' ends, and they can tell what "covenant" means, and what

"substitution" means, and what "regeneration" means. We say, "Who hath brought up these?" It seems so wonderful to us. Has it not often been so to you also, dear friends? Yet, all the while, we have been forgetting the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and we have said, "Why, my poor teaching could not have taught them all this." No, nor has it taught them all this. There is a higher Teacher than the best of ministers, there is a better Teacher than the most earnest and the most advanced of Christians; and he still fulfils that gracious promise, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord."

A further cause of wonder was, *the sudden appearance of this great increase.* Zion enquires, "These, where had they been?" Ah! that is just what I thought and said last night; and that is why I took this text, for it kept coming to my mind, "These, where had they been?" Some of them I had seen here for ever so long; but others of them I had never seen at all, except on two or three Thursday nights lately I noticed them, and perhaps at one or two prayer-meetings, and I began to think that there was something good coming to pass with them, or else they would not have come. So I kept saying to myself, as I went home, "These, where had they been?" A month ago, I could not have found them. "These, where had they been?" They have sprung up, and come forward all of a sudden through the blessed working of the Spirit of God.

"These, where had they been?" Shall I tell you where they had been? Some of them had been in godly families, with fathers and mothers praying for them. No wonder that they came to close in with Christ. Some of them had been in the Sunday-school, in classes where brethren and sisters love their children, and never rest till they bring them to decision for Christ. It is not so very marvellous that they should, by-and-by, come forward. "These, where had they been?" Well, they had been under the influence of Christian wives, Christian children, sometimes Christian brothers and sisters; and so, at last, the gracious influence took effect upon them, by the power of God's Spirit, and out they came. Thank God that there are great numbers still under those sacred influences, for they also are sure to come in due time, and say, "We are on the Lord's side."

Then there were some others. "Where had they been?" Well, they had long been listening to the gospel, regularly sitting in their pews; and we had heard of them as people who had been attracted by our ministry for twenty years, but who did not know the Lord. What a blessing it was for them that, even after the hardening influence of listening so long to the gospel had operated upon them,—for it has such an influence in some cases,—yet, at last, God himself touched the rock, and the waters streamed forth! There are some such persons now coming forward to join us in church-fellowship; let us pray for all the rest of our fellow-worshippers who are unconverted, that they also may come after them.

But there were others whom I saw yesterday about whom I might well ask, "These, where had they been?" On the Lord's-day, at

home in their shirt-sleeves; on week-nights, at the theatre or the music-hall, finding enjoyment in the lowest form of amusement. "Where had they been?" Never troubling church or chapel, some of them scarcely ever entering such an edifice at all; but God, in his providence, brought them for once to hear the Word, and, as one said to me, "I laid hold of something, and something laid hold of me, and I shall never part with it, for it will never part with me." This is how it happened with many utterly irreligious people, those who had no fear or thought of God. And there were some worse still, who had gone into sin, and transgression, and crime; but they had been induced by some kind friend to come and listen to the gospel, so there they were to tell of "free grace and dying love," and to testify what infinite mercy had done for them.

"These, where had they been?" Well, I cannot tell you where they had all been; some had been at death's dark door, buried in sorrow and in sin, in poverty and in vice. Others, though they were not apparently so bad as these, were, notwithstanding, quite as much lost, for they were in the dark wood of self-righteousness, boasting that they were not as other men, and that they were as good as they ought to be, and so deceiving themselves. Now, it is just as much a marvel of mercy for God to save a self-righteous man as it is for him to save a drunkard or a harlot, and it takes as much of the almighty grace of God to tear a man away from his own righteousness as to pull him away from his sin. Oh, the wonders of redeeming love that, out of every place, can fetch its thousands upon thousands to make the church glad, and to cry in sweet surprise, "These, where had they been?"

III. I have no time to dwell on the third point, further than just to say that ALL THINGS SHOULD ENCOURAGE THIS CHURCH—and the same rule applies to every church that God blesses,—TO SEEK LARGER INCREASE.

For, first, dear brethren, *there is the same power to convert ten thousand as there is to convert one.* The Lord, who brought you in, can bring thousands in; and if he adds to our church some hundreds now and then, why should he not be constantly doing it? His arm is not shortened, and he is still ready to bless us.

Besides, we ought to be encouraged by the fact that *the converts come in answer to prayer.* Notice that these additions to our church have come just when we have been praying more than ever. Every Thursday night, before the service, there is a prayer-meeting at 6 o'clock, in which a few friends gather specially to pray that their Pastor may be helped to preach; and to-night I suppose there were three or four hundred gathered together with that object, and it is real praying, let me tell you,—short, deep, earnest cries to God for a blessing; and the preacher cannot help preaching when he is prayed for like that. As that prayer-meeting has increased in intensity and power, a blessing has already begun to come. Some of us are conscious of it; we cannot help seeing it. Is it possible for me not to believe in prayer? Can I deny that there is such a thing as the electric fluid when I see a tower shivered by the

lightning flash? If I were fool enough, I could deny that; but I never could be such a fool as to deny the power of prayer which I see every day exhibited in all sorts of things, and all sorts of ways. Very largely, in proportion as we pray, God blesses the Word. It has been so for years; and they who have been among us, and know, can bear witness that this is an unexaggerated statement of fact. Well, then, if that be so, let us pray; if prayer can be the means of bringing souls to Christ, let there be no stint in that matter.

And, further, since the converts come from all sorts of places, *let us carry the gospel into all sorts of places.* There is not any part of London, however bad it may be, where God may not have an elect soul in it. Go after him, then; down in the deepest kennel, in the worst court, in the filthiest houses, following the vilest occupation, there may be some whom God in mercy means to bless through you; so go after them, and go after them at once. You can never tell where God's chosen ones are. "These, where had they been?" is the question concerning those who have come to him; and where they were, there are others like them.

"How many sheep are straying,
Lost from the Saviour's fold!
Upon the lonely mountain,
They shiver with the cold;
Within the tangled thickets,
Where poison vines do creep,
And over rocky ledges,
Wander the poor lost sheep.

"Oh, come let us go and find them!
In the paths of death they roam;
At the close of the day
'Twill be sweet to say,
'I have brought some lost one home.'"

What a little thing God often blesses to save a soul,—a word from a sister,—a little note from a Christian woman,—half a word in these aisles! A man, who was never before spoken to about his soul, has not been pleaded with for five minutes before he comes under conviction of sin, and soon he finds the Saviour. The very smallest thing has been made the means of bringing souls to Christ. Will you not, dear friends make use of those little things? Will you not use everything? Will you not be willing to spend and be spent for Christ in this blessed work of soul-saving? "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Go on, dear brethren and sisters, to cry mightily to God, and to labour earnestly for him, till we shall, in glad surprise, bless and magnify his grace that multitudes are brought to him, and that his name is made to be yet more renowned. Let us constantly have your prayers at home as well as here, and the Lord be with you all! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—965, 449, 369.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PRIEST AND VICTIM.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 23RD, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, August 28th, 1881.

"He offered up himself."—Hebrews vii. 27.

I DO not know when I have ever felt a more decided conflict of emotions in my own heart than I do just now. Happy is the man who has such a message as that in my text to deliver to his fellow-men; but burdened is the man who feels that the message is far too great for his lips, or, indeed, for any human tongue to convey. To be allowed to announce to men that our Lord Jesus Christ "offered up himself" on their behalf is, indeed, an errand which angels might envy, but the theme is too great for any human being to compass. I comfort myself with the reflection that it does not require any excellence of speech to tell it, the excellence lies in the truth itself; and if men's minds are in a right condition, if they are conscious of their lost state, and they really desire to know what Christ has done to save them from it, they will want no garnishing or tawdry fripperies of human eloquence; all they will want will be to hear, as plainly and as earnestly as it can be spoken, the message of reconciliation which God has sent through Jesus Christ his Son. Yet I cannot help feeling that the meaning of my text is so weighty that it may break the backs of the words that attempt to bring it to us. The axles of my human medium of conveyance are ready to snap when freighted with such a load of infinite love and wisdom as comes to us in my short, full text: "He offered up himself."

But, to begin, I would remind you, dear friends, that the idea of a sacrifice for sin is, in some sense or other, found in almost all human religions. I believe that some of the most ignorant tribes of Africa, and also Unitarians, have been found without the doctrine of an atoning sacrifice in their religion; but I do not think there are any other persons so benighted as these to be found anywhere. Go where you may, you will discover that, as soon as ever people begin to say "God," the next thing they say is "sacrifice";

and though their idea of God is often distorted, and their idea of sacrifice is distorted also, yet both ideas are there. Man, however degraded, cannot altogether forget that there is a God; and then, shrinking back from the awful majesty of the divine holiness, he at least hopes that there is a sacrifice by which his sins may be put away. He feels that there must be one if he is ever to be brought into connection with God; and so, in some form or other, the notion of sacrifice crops up wherever there is any religion at all. It may be in the ghastly form of human sacrifice, which is a hideous misinterpretation which has crept in under the darkness and gloom of heathenism or false teaching; or it may appear in the continued sacrifice of bullocks, or lambs, or other victims; but, somehow or other, the idea is there. Man seems to know, in his inmost nature, that he must bring a sacrifice if he would appear before God; and this is, by no means, an error on his part. However erroneous may be the form it takes, in its essence there is truth in it.

Brothers and sisters, did you never know this truth in your own souls? Has not the conviction come to you, under a sense of sin, as an absolute certainty, that sin must be punished? I will not say that you have thought so when you have imagined yourself to be all right; or, at least, to be pretty nearly clear of anything wrong. No; but when conscience has been awakened, and has begun to speak; in the quiet night watches, in times of sickness, or when you have seemed to be on the brink of eternity, I ask you, has there not come the thought that sin would surely be visited with punishment? That—

"Dread of something after death,"—

of which the world's poet speaks, is an indication of belief in the truth which is most sure, that the Judge of all the earth will not suffer his laws to be trampled on with impunity, but that he will certainly punish iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Then there has also come to your mind, I feel sure;—at least, I remember well when it came to mine,—the thought that God could not pardon me without punishing my sin,—or that, if he did, his moral government of the whole universe would be weakened. If he permitted the guilty to enjoy the same rewards as the righteous received, where would be his justice? An amnesty to the guilty would, practically, be an abolition of the law; it would be tantamount to saying, "It does not matter how you live, all will come right at last." There are some who teach that doctrine, nowadays; and, to state it in plain English, this is the doctrine that they teach, —that we may rebel against God, we may blaspheme God, we may despise God,—we may cheat, we may lie, we may murder, and so on; but it shall be just as well with us one day as it will be with the best man that lives. Does not the least atom of common morality that remains in man compel him to shrink back from teaching so intolerable as that? It cannot be right, we need not argue about the matter; it is impossible that it should be so, for human society would go to pieces under such an arrangement as that, and the Judge of all the earth would have to abdicate his throne ere this

could be. Many years ago, I put into words for myself, when I was under a sense of sin, a feeling which I believe others must have had under similar circumstances; and I said, "If God does not punish me for my sin, he ought to do so." I felt that, if he did not condemn me for my sin, my conscience would condemn him; and that, if he suffered me to go unpunished when I was guilty, in some way or other he would cease to be a just God, and would no longer be worthy of the respect of my own conscience.

Now, that is a truth, a great truth, a terrible truth; and hence it is that the mind of the convinced sinner is driven to the hope of an atonement. If God is to pardon sin, there must be something done by which his law can be honoured, his justice can be vindicated, and his truthfulness can be established; in fact, there must be an atonement. That is what it all comes to; or else pardon is impossible, and you and I must be lost for ever. I would to God that we all not only believed this truth,—as I suspect that the most of us do;—but that we felt it to be the case in our own personal experience, that we realized our need of an atoning sacrifice, in order that God might be just, and yet be the Justifier of the ungodly,—that the honour of his law might shine out in unsullied purity like the terrible crystal, and yet that "a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald," might be seen by the sons of men, reminding them of the covenant made between the Father and the Son concerning all who believe in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

This brings me to the blessed announcement of the text, that the atonement which men have blindly felt after has been made, that the sacrifice which the conscience longs for has been presented. Here is the best possible news in four words: "He offered up himself." Spirit of God, help us to think about this sublime truth, and to speak of it aright!

I. Here is, first, THE PRIEST: "HE offered up himself." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world, and "offered up himself" as a sacrifice for sin. The great High Priest, who officiated on the occasion of that wondrous and unique sacrifice, was Jesus Christ himself.

"He," who was *of infinite dignity*,—he who, in his first estate as very God of very God, was worshipped and obeyed by all the angels of heaven,—he who was with the Father when he spanned the heavens, and laid the foundations of the universe,—he it was, this Son of God, who "offered up himself." No inferior priest was there. There were wicked men, who were the instruments employed in accomplishing his death; but, after all, the great hand that presented the Lamb of God as the one sacrifice for sin was the hand of the Christ of God: "He offered up himself." Our High Priest is of such dignity that none can be compared with him. He is the Son of the Highest, the equal of the Father. I want you to think of this truth, because it may help you to see how great must have been the merit of the sacrifice when it was God himself who "offered up himself." He was no mere delegated or elected priest, but Christ Jesus himself, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead

bodily;"—Christ, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, he it was who stood at the altar presenting "himself" to God as the one and only sacrifice for sin. O sinful men, come ye hither, for here is a sacrifice which may well satisfy the demands of the divine law, since Christ himself puts on the priestly garments, and offers it unto God!

"He offered up himself;" that is to say, *he voluntarily agreed to be the Victim for this wondrous sacrifice.* Did you not notice this truth in the chapter we read just now? "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God." Christ was not compelled to come to earth except by the sweet compulsion of his own love; but with that as his master-motive,—

> "Down from the shining seats above
> With joyful haste he fled."

Voluntarily he took upon himself our nature, and was born at Bethlehem, and voluntarily did he tarry here for three and thirty years. He might have gone back when "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." But he had come in order that he might be a sacrifice for sin, so he remained until the hour appointed for his death; and, even then, he was not forced to die: "He offered up himself." Pilate's servants and Herod's soldiers could not have slain him unless he had been willing to die. He had but to breathe the wish, and the legions of heaven would have burned up the legions of Herod as chaff is consumed in the furnace. Neither the Romans nor the Jews could have nailed him to the tree, nor could all their priests, nor all the ribald mob, have put him to death without his own consent. When he did but speak to them in the Garden of Gethsemane, they went backward, and fell to the ground. He that made the earth to quake and open when he died could have shaken them off the earth, or buried them in it, while he lived, if he had so pleased. But he voluntarily delivered himself up to death. To the very last, there was no compulsion upon him to die, except that compulsion of love of which I have spoken. You and I must die; the infirmities of nature will compel us to give up the ghost; but he was strong and vigorous even at the moment of his death. That glorious shout, "*Consummatum est,*"—"It is finished,"—came from One who was still in the vigour of his strength, and just entering on his eternal victory. When he bowed his head, it was because he would do it, and willingly yielded up his soul, committing his spirit to the Father,—not under constraint, but "he offered up himself." Oh, this makes the sacrifice of Christ so blessed and glorious! They dragged the bullocks and they drove the sheep to the altar; they bound the calves with cords, even with cords to the altar's horn; but not so was it with the Christ of God. None did compel him to die; he laid down his life voluntarily, for he had power to lay it down, and to take it again. "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." "He offered up himself."

From this great truth, we may learn two or three practical lessons. The first is, the blasphemy of supposing that any so-called

"priest" can offer up Christ. There are men who say that, in the unbloody sacrifice of the mass, "there is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead." Stand back, beloved; withdraw from the sons of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, lest the earth should again open, and swallow them up, and they should perish alive in their iniquity. "He offered up himself;" and yet these shavelings say that they offer him again. God have mercy upon them, and open their blind eyes, that they may no longer thus perpetrate an infamous blasphemy against his holy name!

But there is a lesson for us also to learn; and that is, the folly of our attempting to offer any sacrifice whatever to God in and of ourselves; for, brethren, there never was such a sacrifice as Christ on earth. It was the best sacrifice that ever could be, yet nobody offered that but Christ himself. What are your sacrifices and mine? They are very poor things, so shall we dare to offer them to God? Nay, let us ask Christ to offer all our sacrifices for us. If the best sacrifice needed Christ to present it to his Father, then our imperfect sacrifices can only be offered by Jesus Christ our great High Priest; and though we, who trust him, and love his name, are all priests, for he "hath made us kings and priests unto God," yet we are only priests in him, and our sacrifices are only presented in and through him. It must be so; for, if the chief sacrifice is offered by him, all the minor ones must also be presented by him if they are to be accepted by God.

And, dear brethren, here is one other lesson, namely, the security of those who trust in the sacrifice of Christ; for if I accept the sacrifice of Christ for me, and trust in it, if I am not saved by it,—suppose that to be possible,—then it follows that the great High Priest, when "he offered up himself," did not perform an effectual work. That would be a terrible imputation upon his honour. God forbid that we should entertain it for a single moment! Much, it is said, in the offering of the mass in the Romish Church, depends upon the intention of the priest. I should think so; but we know what the intention of our High Priest was. We dare not rely upon the intention of any human priest, but we know that our Lord Jesus Christ "offered up himself,"—not in fiction or hypocrisy, but in reality, and with his whole heart and soul; and we are certain that he offered an acceptable and an effectual sacrifice to God, and that we who trust in it must be saved. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the effect of that dread sacrifice must stand, for he who offered it is the Son of God. Fall back, my soul, on this firm rock, and there rest securely whatever doubts may come to assail thee.

II. Now, in the second place, I shall ask you carefully to look at THE SACRIFICE: "He offered up *himself*." That is to say, Jesus Christ did not offer lamb or ram, bird or bullock; but "himself."

That is a great word, and it means that his whole nature as man was offered up in death as an atonement for us,—*his whole nature as man, perfect and sinless, and indissolubly united with his Divine nature.* I do not say that God died, nor would I put it quite so;

but I will say that he who died was God, though man, and that "he offered up himself,"—the whole of himself,—in sacrifice to God on our behalf. His precious body suffered pains which are indescribable, but which I pray you never to undervalue or forget. I have seen criticisms concerning what is called "the sensuousness" of certain of our hymns that speak of his wounds, and so on. Never mind the criticism,—be willing to be called sensuous, Holy Scripture might be condemned on the same ground. You will never understand the agony of Christ's soul if you despise the agony of his body; for, while the sufferings of his soul were the soul of his sufferings, yet the sufferings of his body were the body of his sufferings, and he who does not think much of the body of the sufferings is not likely to know much about the soul of them.

His body was given for you and for me; and, then, his spiritual nature—his mind, his intellect, his heart, his imagination,—every pure unspotted faculty of that blessed soul of his,—he gave up all for us. The alabaster box, his body, was broken; and the precious nard, his soul, was poured out like a divine perfume upon the head of our poor humanity. It was all given for us: "He offered up himself." Not his garments only, though he was stripped naked;—not his glory only, though he emptied himself;—not his life only, though he laid down his life for us;—but "he offered up himself." Oh, it is a great word, but it describes a great sacrifice; and it needed all that to make an atonement for our sins, and all that he gave.

"He offered up himself;" that is, *he presented himself to God as a sacrifice, and he did actually die.* O brothers and sisters, I cannot describe that wondrous death! You and I have never died. We have been sick, but to actual death we have never yet come. Some of us never shall know death as Christ knew it; for, remember, death was death to him; but for his saints the bitterness of death is past. Christ had to endure death in all its bitterness, but he has taken away the wormwood and the gall of death for us who believe in him. Many of those who were martyred for his name's sake, when they burned at the stake could sing as they died, and counted the flames as though they were but beds of roses, for he was with them, and God was with them to sustain them; but, for him, there was no such succour, no Divine support. "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" was the cry into which more grief was packed away than can even be found in any sufferer in hell; for, recollect, the griefs of Christ were not the griefs sufficing for one lost man, but for unnumbered myriads who would otherwise have been banished from the presence of God for ever. "He offered up himself." Oh! see him die, if you can bear the sight; his blessed soul exhaled, his body left behind to be buried in the tomb. "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

I always think, with regard to that offering up of himself, that *it was a very mysterious transaction*, into which you and I must not pry with any sinful curiosity. Yet, as I meditated upon this subject, it appeared to me that the cross, which seemed so small a thing out yonder on that little rising ground of Golgotha,—that one cross,

standing in the centre of the three, appeared to me to be the centre of the entire universe, and so it is. If the inhabitants in all the stars did not see Christ die, if from all worlds they could not behold the dreadful sight, yet they must have heard of it in many a star by this time. Swift spirits have told, in those bright orbs where myriads of unfallen creatures dwell, the story that, on this little dusky planet, sin struggled against incarnate love, and love, to conquer it, did die, and in the dying won the victory. I cannot tell you how many races of intelligent beings there are beside the hierarchy of angels, but it is not at all improbable that there are as many worlds as there are grains of sand upon the seashore, and perhaps every one of these teems with inhabitants more than our earth does; and they have heard, and they keep on hearing, and the news keeps spreading everywhere, that the God, who made them all, took human form, and died to put away human sin.

And, supposing this is the case, what do you think all these intelligent beings say? It must be that the impression made upon them is that sin is a horrible thing, since it stabs at God himself. All intelligences must also feel that God is just, since he will sooner himself die than let sin go unpunished. It further rings throughout the spheres that God is love,—that he will sooner bleed to death than let his creatures perish; and that here he once proved, in his death, that he was infinite both in his vengeance and his mercy. All the universe throughout eternity shall hear this wondrous story; it is so marvellous that it will never grow stale. They are telling it, to-night, to wondering assemblies, compared with which this vast congregation is but as a drop in a bucket. Standing in some central star, some mighty intelligence is proclaiming this story, perhaps to as many worlds as there are men and women in this building. Certainly, it is worthy of such an audience, for never was there such news as that the infinite, immortal, eternal, invisible, almighty, loving God did come, and take upon himself the sin of men, and at last suffered and died in the room and stead of guilty sinners.

You say, perhaps, that I am dreaming while talking to you thus. But dear friends, we sometimes learn more truth in dreams than when we are awake. At any rate, this I know. I would sooner be mistaken in enlarging too much upon the wondrous fact and efficacy of the cross than I would ever become one of those who shrivel up the atonement till there is little or nothing of it left. I believe that there was such a necessity for Christ to die as you and I have never yet imagined; that he did not die merely because his death was necessary upon this planet, but that it was necessary through every province of the infinite dominions of God, and that it was necessary to the very nature of God himself, which is saying still more. There was a supreme necessity that Christ should die; I am sure of it, for else he would not have died. The Father would never have given up his Son to the death of the cross unless it had been imperative that this sacrifice should be offered, or else that men should suffer for ever. Oh, wonder of wonders! Tell it everywhere, and never cease to tell it. "He offered up himself."

III. Now, lest I should weary you, I will, in closing, only say a

little upon the third point, which is, CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THIS TRUTH, WHICH ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO US.

The first is this. "He offered up himself;" *but he did not offer up himself for himself.* That is an offering which cannot be imagined. So far as Christ was himself alone concerned, there was no necessity that he should die. He was infinitely glorious and blessed. "He offered up himself," but not for himself; then, for whom did he die? For men. We are told that he took not up angels, but he took up the seed of Abraham, he took up sinful men. O poor sinner, I want you to think of this! Let your soul see Jesus on the cross,—bleeding, writhing, suffering, tortured, dying, dead; and then recollect that there was not one pang, or groan, or sigh for himself; it was all for others,—for his enemies. I wish we could all say, one by one, "It was for me. He loved me, and gave himself for me. He endured the cross for me, his blood was shed for me, those agonies and cries and griefs were all for me. For me, the death-pang and the expiring groan; all for me, for me." If thou believest in Jesus, it is even so. There must have been something great done for thee there. Thy great sin must have been buried there. The great hell, which thou oughtest to have endured, must have been extinguished there so far as thou art concerned. The great heaven, which thou couldst never else have entered, must have been opened there, if he died there for thee. Untold blessings are insured to thee in that matchless death. Dwell on that thought, beloved. "He offered up himself;" but not for himself. It must have been, then, for the guilty. O my soul, it must have been, it was, for thee if thou believest in him!

Next, notice that *this great deed of love was really done:* "He offered up himself." He did really do it. I know that, when I am preaching, some of you seem to think that I am only talking about fanciful or imaginary matters. If I were to begin to speak of President Garfield and his sickness, or about the wet weather and the harvest, you would say, "These are facts." O sirs, but this also is a fact, and the greatest of all facts: "He offered up himself." It happened long ago, but it is true that he did this. That same God that painted every flower,—that spread the skies,—the God that made us,—came here in human form, and after living here a life of blessing and beneficence, he died as a sacrifice for human guilt. This is not something that is yet to be done. It is all over; Jesus himself said, "It is finished." If I had to tell you that God would come here, and become man, and die for us, you might say, "It may not be; it is too great a condescension. Do you know how great God is, and can it be imagined that he should come down to earth, and be veiled in human flesh, and in that flesh should suffer and die? It cannot be." But I have to tell you that it has been done, it is a fact accomplished. He did it: "He offered up himself." It may sometimes have been a question among believers who lived before Christ died,—"Will he really die?" But it is no question to you and me, for he has died, his great deed of love is done.

And he so completely did this that *it will never be done again.* If you will not accept this Christ, there will never be another; and

if you will not be saved by his redemption, you will never be redeemed at all. And there is this comfort about it,—that he only died once because there is no need that he should ever die again. His one death has slain death for all who trust him. His one bearing of sin has put their sin away for ever. God now can justly forgive the believing sinner; and he may well blot out the debt when it has been paid by his Son. Well may he remit the sentence against us now that his Son has stood in our place, and borne the penalty due to our sin. God is therefore just when he justifies those for whom Christ died; where would his justice be if he did not so? Did Christ pay my debts, and am I arrested for them? Did he die for me, and shall I perish? Where then is the atonement? Beloved, if thou believest in Jesus, be glad that he died once, and be gladder still that he cannot die again, and that there is no need that he should. The atonement is completed; thou art saved; and thou shalt never come into condemnation. How I wish that I could preach on such a theme as this as it deserves! But I do not know how it is to be done; it does not seem to me as if any human words could ever fittingly set forth such a wondrous mystery. Nay, though they were written across the face of the sky,—unless God himself wrote them with a finger of lightning,—I know of no way in which this truth could be fitly set out: "He offered up himself."

But, my dear hearers, I wish you would all lay hold of this blessed truth! When I laid hold of it, it was the crisis in my whole history; and to this hour it is the joy of my soul. I could not give up this blessed belief,—that "he offered up himself" in the room and place and stead of all his people, of all who believe in him, and that, therefore, they are safe for ever.

I must sum up, in a few words, much more that I might have said. And, first, this truth quiets the conscience. "He offered up himself." Conscience never murmurs after the blood of Jesus has been applied to it. I say to myself, "Jesus died for me; Jesus suffered in my stead; Jesus took my guilt; Jesus bore my punishment;" and my conscience says, "That is enough; that is all I want."

This truth also satisfies my understanding. Let those who will sneer at the simple gospel, and the doctrine of substitution; but I have no understanding that is too large to be satisfied with these things. It seems to me that, if God appointed Christ to be an atonement for sin, and if he is satisfied with his sacrifice, I may well be content. Surely, if my great Creditor and Judge is appeased by what his Son has offered on my behalf, it is not for me to begin to cavil at it. I know how some criticize the great central truth of the atonement. I care not how they criticize it so long as God has accepted it; and since he has also accepted me in Christ Jesus, my Lord and Saviour, my soul feels perfectly content, and understands why she is contented.

And, oh! how this truth also wins the affections of men! Can you help loving the Christ who offered up himself for you? And loving him, do you not desire to honour and glorify him? Do you not feel that you hate the sin that made him die? Do you not wish

to be like him, and in everything to give him pleasure by a life of holiness, and self-denial, and self-sacrifice? I know you do; it must be so. Because Jesus sacrificed himself for you, you feel that you must love him with all your heart.

Does not this truth also arouse your admiration? Say, brothers and sisters, if there is anything that can move you like this glorious truth of which I have been speaking? Does it not arouse your highest admiration when you remember that the Lord Jesus Christ took your sin upon himself, and suffered in your stead? I know that there is no hand that can sweep the strings of my heart with such power as can the hand that was pierced for me. This theme enkindles my enthusiasm, and stirs my passions to a flame, and makes me wish for the tongues of men and of angels that I might be able to tell out this story of "love so amazing, so divine." I would ask no other heaven, if I might have my choice, than, having to meditate upon the passion of my Lord, and to tell it out to others, and then to fall at his dear feet, and worship him world without end, for he was slain, and has redeemed me by his precious blood. You take Christ out of the gospel, and out of your preaching, and see whether you will arouse any enthusiasm among your people. There is a cold, steely religion, sharp and deadly, out of which the atonement has gone; but was it ever a power in this land, or any other, or will it ever be? Only preach the Christless gospel, and you shall have spiders in abundance in your places of worship, and very few men and women. They run away, if they are wise, from the place where Christ is not preached, and his atoning blood is not constantly set forth. Point that place out to me on the map of London, and I will show you the spot where there is a beggarly array of empty benches, and few hearers; for they fly, and rightly so, as hungry men flee from the place where there is no bread, and as the thirsty in the wilderness turn away from the dried-up well. They get still more thirsty as long as they stay by the empty mockery, so they hasten away from it. But preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, preach the atoning sacrifice, and see how the people flock together. Let them believe this truth, let them love it, and their whole spirit is stirred within them, and everyone becomes a soldier of the cross, a warrior for Jesus Christ. I am sure it is so; and what I feel within my own spirit I know that you all feel too, for "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."

And, finally, this truth, that Christ offered up himself, leads us who accept it to be ready for self-sacrifice. It makes the believing man say, "As he offered himself for me, I must give myself for him." It teaches the doctrine of the self-sacrifice of men for God, and of men for men. This is the nursery of brave spirits, and the school in which true heroes are trained. None have been bolder for the truth, and for the right, and for the advancement of the ages, and for the glory of God, than those who have enshrined the blood-red cross within their hearts, and who have been prepared for love of it even to die. O Christ of God, thou who hast offered thyself for us, we offer ourselves to thee; accept us now! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

HEBREWS X. 1—22.

Verse 1. *For the law—*

The old ceremonial law of Moses,—

1. *Having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.*

Those that were sprinkled with the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices did not feel that their sin was for ever put away. They went back, after the victim had been offered, with a certain measure of rest and relief, but not with that perfect rest which is the accompaniment of the pardon that Jesus gives to those who come unto God through him.

2. *For—*

If the worshippers had thus been made perfect; if they had been completely cleansed and accepted through these sacrifices,—

2. *Then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.*

The fact that there was a lamb to be offered every morning and every evening, and that there was a great day of atonement to be observed every year, proved that there was sin still remaining, which had not been put away, and that the worshippers needed to come again, and again, and yet again, with fresh sacrifices for their fresh sins. The apostle's argument is unanswerable.

3, 4. *But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

Your common sense tells you "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Although rivers of such blood should continually be flowing, what efficacy could there be in them to put away the moral stain of guilt and transgression against God?

5. *Wherefore when he cometh into the world,—*

That great HE,—that Divine HE,—our Saviour and our God. "when he cometh into the world,"—

5—7. *He saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.*

That will had not been done, although myriads of sacrifices had been offered. But Christ came really to do that will by offering himself as the one and only acceptable sacrifice.

8, 9. *Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.*

An end was made of the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, that the real substance might be introduced by Christ. Never imagine, dear friends, that the old Jewish ceremonial law is to drag on its existence, and to be intermingled with the Christian dispensation. Ah, no! As the shadows of the night vanish when the sun arises, as the lamps in yonder street are put out when daylight returns, so was it with all the types and shadows of the ancient law when the great Antitype appeared.

10. *By the which will—*

That is, the will of God as done by Christ: "By the which will"—

10—12. *We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes ths same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;—*

Oh, what a blessed doctrine this is,—that the one offering of Christ has done what the tens of thousands of offerings under the old law never could accomplish! All the work of man is but the spinning of a righteousness which is undone as quickly as it is spun; but Christ has finished the seamless and spotless robe of his righteousness which is to last for ever. By his one sacrifice, he has ended all the fruitless labour of the ages; and, now, as many of us as have believed in him have all the benefits of his perfect work.

Having completed his great task, he "sat down on the right hand of God;"—

13. *From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.*

"Expecting." That was the subject of this morning's sermon.* We are expecting something better than we have yet seen. "We were saved in hope." We are expecting that which is yet to be revealed; and our covenant Head is expecting, too. This is the age of expectancy. We have not yet come to the fulness of the blessing that is ours in Christ Jesus. The mercy of God is at present only in the bud; the fully-developed flower has yet to be seen. Christ is expecting; his saints are expecting; the whole creation is expecting.

14—17. *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

Oh, what a blessed covenant this is! Christ's death has established a covenant of grace in which there is no flaw, and no possibility of failure, for the one condition of the covenant has been fulfilled by Christ, and now it stands as a covenant of "shalls" and "wills" on God's part from which he will never run back. It is not, "If they do this, and if they do that, I will do the other;" but it is all "*I will.*" "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

18. *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*

No more offering for sin is needed, for the work of atonement is fully done, and done for ever. As the sin of all who believe in Jesus is put away, what need is there of any further sacrifice on account of it? The atonement is complete; let us therefore rejoice in it, and praise God for it.

19—22. *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—555, 299, 289.

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* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,616, "Saved in Hope."

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GRACE PREFERRED TO GIFTS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, September 1st, 1881.

"But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."—1 Corinthians xii. 31.

THERE are among us many who have recently joined the visible Church of Christ. We have heartily welcomed them, and we desire always to entertain concerning them a joyous feeling of thankfulness that they have united with us. May they never have to regret it, and may the Church of God never have to regret it, either! Dear friend, now that you have become a member of a Christian church, you should say to yourself, "What can I do for it? I have not come here merely to confess that I am saved, and there to let the matter stop; but I have enlisted in an army, that I may be a comrade with other soldiers, and be drilled, and trained, and equipped so that I may know how to march and to go forth to the battle. I have come into the church to be a member of a body. What is my office? Every member has its own special office in the body; it is not there merely for its own comfort, but to be a help to the whole system of which it forms a part. What, then, can I do?" The question which we should each one ask of the Lord is that which Saul asked on the way to Damascus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

When that question is once answered, and you, dear friend, know your proper place in the body of Christ, and have taken that place, whatever it may be, I think that your next desire will be that you may be in the best spiritual health,—that you may be as vigorous as you can be,—that, little though you ever may have to place at your Lord's disposal, yet that the best use may be made of that little. Even when we have done all those things that are commanded us, we shall still have to confess that we are unprofitable servants to our great Lord and Master; yet every one of us should pray that he may have as much to use for Christ as he can use, and that he may be as well fitted by the Holy Spirit for the Master's service as it is possible that he can be. I would like to give to God

the best that I have; and, as that must be my whole spirit, soul, and body, ought I not to wish that my spirit, soul, and body should be at their very best? I believe that many of you, dear friends, feel just as I do about this matter; and, therefore, I shall not do wrong if I stir up the pure minds of those who have, through infinite mercy, given themselves to Christ, and say to them, "Make the most of yourselves: make the best of yourselves. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts.'" But when I have said that, I shall have to add a caveat; and, possibly, that caveat will rise into a word of encouragement and exhortation: "Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."

There are two things in the text. There is, first, *an excellent way;* and, secondly, there is "*a more excellent way.*"

I. First, there is AN EXCELLENT WAY. That is, for each individual Christian to "covet earnestly the best gifts."

Paul is not speaking here concerning ordinary gifts as we see them in men of the world who are gifted in various ways; but he is referring to spiritual gifts,—gifts which we dare to ask of God, gifts which we may expect the Spirit of God to bestow upon us, gifts which can be used in the Church of Christ, and which we desire to possess in order that we may use them to the glory of God. We have not all the spiritual gifts which were entrusted to the first Christian Church; I do not suppose it would have been wise that we should have had them.

The gift of miracles, for instance, if it had continued in the Church, would have attracted the notice of men rather to the supernatural power of God than to the moral and spiritual power of Christ Jesus our Saviour as manifested through the Divine Spirit. This great spiritual battle between right and wrong, which is being fought out in the arena of the world, God never intended to be fought out by mere might and power through the dazzling display of signs and wonders; but he resolved to win the victory by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit: according to that word unto Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." He intended to work in a spiritual manner upon the hearts of men, and therefore he dispensed with the aid of miracles, which had been necessary in the first stage of the Church's growth. You have no doubt often seen, in the case of a young tree when it is newly planted, that a stout stake is driven in by the side of it, and the sapling is tied to that stake; but when the tree grows bigger and stronger, it needs no such support. So has it been with the Church of Christ on earth. At first it was feeble, and needed to be upheld and sustained by the aid of miracles, and wonders, and signs; but it needs that aid no longer. Or, as you have seen a ship in the Thames, being towed out to sea; and then, when it is fairly out upon the ocean, it is trusted to its own steam, or to the winds of heaven, so has it been with the Christian Church. She was towed out of the narrow river of Judaism, on to the broad sea of later times; and now, the ever-blessed Spirit speeds her on her way without the tug of miracles.

How far the gifts of healing may still remain in the Church, I should not like to be forced to say;—either to say that they remain,

lest any should be led into fanaticism; or to say that they are utterly gone, lest I should be denying some things which, at any rate, look like facts. God does, I doubt not, still hear the believing prayers of his servants concerning the sick; at least, in certain cases, and still should it be, as I judge, an ordinance to be observed, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." Be that matter how it may, that is not the subject of this evening's discourse. The spiritual gifts, of which I am to speak, are those about which there can be no question that they do remain and are to be had by those who earnestly covet them, and diligently seek them.

One of the first of these gifts is *knowledge*. Dear friends, you who are beginners in the school of Christ, seek after more knowledge of the Word of God, and seek it very earnestly. You were brought to Christ, knowing very little except yourself a sinner and Christ a Saviour; but now that you are saved, you should try to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." "Search the Scriptures." Be familiar with the doctrines of grace. Seek to be established in the faith; and, as the apostle Peter says, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." I wish that all religious professors sought to be more deeply instructed by the Word read and by the Word heard, and by experience and meditation in the things of God. Covet earnestly this spiritual gift of knowledge, and give yourselves diligently to the search after it, that you may become fully established in the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What a blessing you will be to others if you have much knowledge of the things of God! How often you will be able to help those who are in spiritual difficulties! How frequently you will be enabled to flash light upon the darkness of the ignorant, and to bring comfort to those who are in distress of soul! Solomon said, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding;" which I would interpret here as an understanding of the Word of the Lord.

Next to that, dear friend, covet earnestly *the power to impart knowledge*. It is not everybody who possesses knowledge who can convey it to others. There is a habit, there is a fitness, there is a spirit, there is a mode, which men must obtain if they are to be "apt to teach." I have known some who have attempted to pour truth into very narrow-necked vessels, such as children are; but they have spilled far more than they have poured in. Some are so confused in their proclamation of the truth that they are misunderstood. Some put the wrong truth foremost, and seem as if they would explain the mysteries of the Revelation before they have taught the simplicities of Matthew and the other Evangelists. They are perpetually putting the cart before the horse. Do not so, beloved, but ask the Holy Spirit

to bestow upon you the gifts of teaching, that you may become, to those whom God puts in your way, ready to communicate the truth, breaking the bread of life upon which you have yourself first fed.

With that gift of teaching, get, if you can, that other *blessed gift of personal address*, so as to be able to "button-hole" people, and to speak to them individually about their danger, and the way of escape from it. If you possibly can, do acquire the holy art of soul-winning; it is the finest piece of Christian education that I know of,—the power to hunt for men as hunters seek their game,—to track them to their hiding-places,—to stop up the holes in which they seek to get shelter, and to take them in gospel nets, and bring them as willing captives to your Lord and Master. This spiritual hunting is grand work; may you be well skilled in it! It is a very special gift; covet it earnestly. I am sure that I covet it greatly. There are some here who have it in a very marked degree; I would that all God's people had this precious spiritual gift.

Then there is what we call "gift in prayer"—*the gift of public prayer*,—covet that also, dear brethren. Some excellent members of the church never pray in public, and I do not blame them. God forbid that we should do so! Still, I am inclined to think that a very large number of our dumb people would have been able to speak and pray in public if they had only begun earlier in their Christian life, and I also believe that they would be able to do so now if they were not quite so proud. "Oh!" say you, "that is rather a hard word." Well, brother, you are afraid that you would break down, are you not? Now, if you would not mind doing so, and would break down two or three times, you would do well enough afterwards. Some of you, possibly, are afraid to pray even in your own family circle because you think that you would not find suitable words. Now, suppose that you were to tell the Lord that you are afraid you cannot use appropriate language, and ask him to help you; and then suppose you can only utter half a dozen sentences; if your children come and complain that the family prayer was too short, it will be a novel sort of complaint, I have heard sometimes about its being too long; and if ever you hear me complain of anybody breaking down in the prayer-meeting, I beg you to mark that word, for it will be a remarkable thing for me to say. On the contrary, I am glad to hear a brother break down; I wish some of you would do so. Some of our young friends, when they break down, give new life to the meeting. They put real feeling into it, for we are all alive with sympathy towards them. Their breaking down does us far more good than the long, prosy prayers that rather weary us than help us. When some trembling brother stands up in the meeting, when he pours out the requests of his heart, with simplicity and earnestness, in a way that suits us all, we thank God for him, and we feel that we have been as much refreshed by the few minutes of his prayer as we should have been by the best possible discourse. So, dear friend, covet earnestly the gift of public prayer, for it tends greatly to the edification of your fellow-believers. If you have the gift in any measure, cultivate it, and seek to possess more and more of it.

And what a precious gift is that of *preaching the Word!* Thank God that this gift is still preserved in the midst of the Church; for the pulpit, rightly filled, is the tower of the flock. It is the very bastion of the walls of Zion. As long as her watchmen shall stand there, and cry aloud in God's name, the foe shall not be able to enter, or to break her peace. There are many men, who have this gift, who do not cultivate it, and do not use it as much as they ought. I say not that all preachers should become regular pastors of the flocks, but we have among us many men of business, who could speak for Christ here and there, in the streets, or in a cottage, or in large assemblies, when they might be called upon, and who ought to endeavour, as much as in them lies, to get the power of speech that they may speak well for Jesus Christ. In this sense, dear brethren, "covet earnestly the best gifts."

Another very desirable spiritual gift is that of *wisdom to direct tried souls.* I have known, and you have known, some who have been wise in this sense quite early in life; and others we have known,—the gift usually comes in this way,—who have become wise through experience. They are not easily deceived; they are men of steadfastness; they know what they believe, and they know why they believe it; and when a difficult case, which has puzzled many, is brought before them, you are astonished to see what a discerning spirit God has given to them, so that they at once indicate the right course to be taken. They can discover the clue of the maze, and those who follow it come to the desired point very speedily. Now, these persons are invaluable in the church,—matronly women, and venerable men, who can speak a word in season to him that is weary, or a word of warning to him that is ready to slip with his feet; and who can do it so kindly that no offence is taken at what they say; and who can do it at the right time, and in the right tone and spirit, so that the message is regarded, and is not forgotten.

I pray God to raise up many in our midst who shall have this very precious gift. I have sometimes heard people say, in disparagement of certain churches, that "they take in a lot of young people,—mere boys and girls." Yes, and we should like to take in a lot more of that sort. We are always open to receive any quantity of Christ's lambs; for, in due season, they will grow into sheep, and so the flock will be perpetuated. I came to London just about the time when good Mr. Joseph Irons, of Camberwell, had finished his ministry. I had read how some people complained that, in his early days, he had received a great many young people into his church; and when I came to New Park Street, I had the high privilege of finding these young people turned into old, experienced believers; and amongst the first who came to join with us, when the standard was lifted up, was a goodly number of these gracious men and women,—nearly all of whom are now with God;—they became pillars in the midst of our church, and they contributed greatly to its stability and its usefulness. They were some of the boys and girls whom young Joseph Irons received into the church; only, having been boys and girls perhaps forty or fifty years previously, they were not very boyish and girlish when I knew them.

What a comfort those who have long been in Christ are to the minister! What a help those who have much of the spirit of their Master are to their fellow-members! What a terror they are to the ungodly! The devil himself cannot move these people from their steadfastness, for God is with them, and therefore they are so strong that they overcome even the wicked one. Alas! it is always true that we have not many fathers; but when we do get some fathers and mothers in Israel, they are a great strength and a great treasure to us, and God is to be thanked for them. I want you young people to mind that, as you grow older, you grow wiser; and to see to it that you do endeavour so to live near to God, and to walk before him, as to get deeper and deeper into the very heart of the truth of God, so that, in after years, you may have the blessed spiritual gift of wisdom which will enable you to guide others.

Meanwhile, there is a gift which comes to us without our using any direct means to obtain it,—a sort of outgrowth from a godly character, namely, *influence*. I will not attempt to define what it is, but you know well enough when you feel it. A man stands up to pray in the prayer-meeting; and a stranger who may be present thinks, "What a delightful prayer that is, yet nobody seems to be affected by it!" Then another person stands up to pray; he is not very fluent, and the stranger does not think that his prayer is at all remarkable, but he notices that the people appear to feel the force of it. Why is that? The difference is in the man who presents the prayer; there is an influence exerted by him which the other man does not possess. I believe that there are some men who, if they were very ill, and could only be borne from their beds to say half a dozen sentences, would work more good in the hearts of those who heard them than some others would do by half a score of sermons. To quote a living instance;—I may venture to do so, for I do not suppose that the brother whose name I am about to mention will ever know that I did it. When I listened to dear Mr. George Müller, I thought, "Well, now, that is very simple talk; a child from the Sabbath-school might almost say all that he has said." Yet I was edified to the highest degree because there was George Müller's influence at the back of all that he said. That was the secret of its power. I knew something of his holy life, his power with God in prayer, his faith, and the great work which it had enabled him to accomplish; so the simplest sentence seemed to drop into my soul with weight, and power, and unction, for there was the influence of the good man behind it all; and glad enough was I to sit at his feet, and listen to his gracious talk. I do not recollect anything he said that was at all striking, or fresh, or new, or original; it was because the man had been with God, and had his Lord's presence continually with him, that his words came with unction and power.

Now, brethren, this is a spiritual gift which we ought earnestly to covet. Oh, that we might be spiritually like Asher! You know that part of Asher's blessing was, "Let him dip his foot in oil!" What was the consequence of the fulfilment of that blessing? Why, that,

wherever he went, he left an oily mark behind him. "What sort of a minister have you now?" I once asked a person, who came from a place where the new minister had been for, perhaps, a year or two, and I had known the previous one,—"What sort of a minister have you now?" The answer I received was, "Well, sir, we have a man of this kind; if he comes into your house for only ten minutes, you know that he has been there." That is the sort of man I should like to be, and the sort of woman I wish you to be, dear sister,—so that, when you go even for a little time into the company of others, they may know that you have been there. Ay, and when you do not go anywhere, when you are lying upstairs in bed sick, may you have such an influence about you that your power shall be felt far away, and those who have been serving God shall serve him the better, and the more earnestly, and the more joyfully, because they remember you; and your influence, by God's blessing upon it, shall be quickening and strengthening to them. This was the kind of influence which Paul wielded even from his prison at Rome, for many of the brethren, waxing confident by his bonds, were moved to serve God all the better because their fellow-soldier was compelled to be absent from the fight.

All these that I have mentioned are spiritual gifts; therefore, seek them; covet them earnestly; for they will be a blessing to you, they will be a blessing to others, and they will bring glory to God. That is an excellent way for you to walk in.

II. But, in the second place, I have to speak to you, as the apostle writes to these Corinthians, concerning "A MORE EXCELLENT WAY." Silver is good, but gold is better. A certain way may be excellent, but another way may be more excellent still. Gifts are good, but grace is better. Get gifts, spiritual gifts, but also get grace; and, above all, get the best grace, the noblest grace, the greatest grace; that is, love, for love to God, and love to your fellow-men, and love to the Church of God,—this is "a more excellent way."

Get much grace, then, first, *because you need it.* I do not know that you need gifts. Perhaps, dear friends, you are not lacking in gifts. You require some for the service of your Lord, but perhaps you have sufficient; and it may be that, if you had more, they would be an encumbrance to you; but I am sure that you need grace. A man may be really better off with one talent than with five, but he cannot be better off with one measure of grace than with five. The more grace we have, the better; for thus we shall be "rich toward God," and this kind of riches brings no sorrow with it. You need a great deal more grace than you think you do; something is going to happen in which you will need great grace. Perhaps there is to be more trial for you; possibly, there is to be more prosperity; and certainly you will need more grace then. But, whatever is to come, get more grace, because you will need it.

I must warn you young converts, and also all other believers, that one reason why you will need grace is, because the devil will be certain, sooner or later, to assail you with fierce temptations. If ever there is a railway made to a place where there are no tempta-

tions, I suspect that they will have to run a great many trains there; but will there ever be discovered such a country? Never, beneath the cope of heaven; as long as we are here, we must be tried, and I am always slow to advise people to try to change their trials for any others. I remember the world's poet speaks of a something that—

> "Makes us rather bear these ills we have,
> Than fly to others that we know not of."

The burden which I have to carry, I have carried so long that it begins to fit my shoulders; and I would not like to change it for yours, even though yours may be lighter than mine, for there is an awkward corner about yours that perhaps fits the shape of your back, but it would not so well fit mine; it would be more burdensome to me than it is to you, and my load would be more weighty to you than it is to me. We had better let the temptations that we now have be bravely conquered than suppose that, by changing our adversaries, we could secure a victory. If you were to get quite alone, as our Saviour was in the wilderness, with nothing but the wild beasts round about you, you could not shut out the devil even then. Forty days he had for meditation, and prayer, and fasting, yet there was the devil waiting to assail him again and again. So I repeat that not even solitude, if the lonely hours were spent in prayer, and fasting, and watching, could secure us immunity from temptation; it must and will attack us. We ought to be very grateful when, for a time, we are free from it; but we ought still to be on our watch-tower, for, at any moment, that adversary, whose noiseless flight no ear has ever heard, that relentless foe—who is not to be perceived by the eye, for he is an invisible spirit who may descend from the air of which he is the prince, and alight at our side,—may begin to tempt us, though we are fresh from our knees, and covered with the dew of communion with God. The mercy is, that active and vigilant as Satan is, the grace of God is more than a match for him; so again I urge you to get more grace because you need it in resisting temptation.

Next, get more grace, *because you can have it.* There is no limit there. Perhaps, even though you covet earnestly the best gifts, there may be some gifts which you will never receive. A brother may wish to preach, and yet he may never be able to do so. Another may desire to pray in public, and yet, perhaps, he may never be bold enough to open his mouth in the assembly. One may long for wisdom that he may guide others, yet it may never be granted to him. But all can have grace. That is a fountain which is ever flowing, a river from which all who will may drink. There are, in certain places, little ponds by the roadside; and as you pass by you may see notices giving warning that no dogs may be washed there. Go down to the River Thames, and see whether you can find there any notice of that kind. There stands a bullock, knee-deep in the stream, and drinks all he wants; and all kinds of creatures come and wash or swim in the water. There is such a plenty of it that nobody is refused. So is it with the grace of God; it is a vast river which cannot be exhausted, and therefore the

divine invitation is, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." So get more grace, dear friend, because you can have it.

Get more grace, also, *because you will be sure to be useful then.* I am not sure that you would be more useful if you had more talent. There are some men who have too many talents ever to be of much use to the church or the world. You may think that this is a strange thing for me to say; but I really mean it. They seem to have such big sails that their boat cannot sail; it capsizes. They need to have bigger boats, and more of the ballast or burden of trouble to carry; and then, peradventure, they might bear their huge sails in safety. It is not every gift that makes a man useful; but I am sure that all grace makes us useful. Gift is often barren, but grace is always fruitful. You can bury gift in a napkin, but who can put grace in a cloth, and hide it away? Grace is one of the things that cannot be buried; it is a living thing, a burning thing, and it must make you useful if you have it; therefore, seek to have more and more of it.

Get more grace, dear brother, *because so you will assuredly glorify God.* I am not sure that you would always glorify God if you had more gifts. How little glory God gets often out of great gifts! I recollect how, when I began to preach the gospel, I used to wish that Milton had been a preacher. I often thought what a grand thing it would have been if Shakespeare had been a minister; with his wonderful versatility of talent, and poetry of expression, I thought he would have been a very powerful preacher. But, afterwards, I almost thanked God that we had not any Miltons or Shakespeares preaching. It is far better to have men of quite another stamp, so that the hearers may not be carried away either with poetical expressions or with an excess of worldly knowledge and ability. Those fishermen, over by the Sea of Galilee, who did not know much except about fish, were more fit to preach the gospel than were those fine gentlemen at Athens, who thought they knew everything that was to be known in all the world. They were too full of worldly wisdom to learn the wisdom that cometh down from above; but those fishermen were just simple souls who could believe what they were told, and who could repeat to others what Christ had said to them; and that is the kind of instrument that Christ generally uses in the effecting of his gracious purposes of mercy. So, beloved, covet earnestly much grace, for grace always glorifies God. There is not a grain of grace in the world which does not reflect the light of his face from whom it came. Gifts may be prostituted to the vilest purposes, but grace—the grace of God—always brings glory to his holy name. Therefore, while you "covet earnestly the best gifts," "yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." That is, seek to obtain continually more grace.

Now, in closing my discourse, let me tell you, beloved brothers and sisters, why this is "a more excellent way." First, you may have gifts, and yet you may be still only natural men and women. The highest gifts of preaching that ever men have had, or of poetry, by which they could write choice hymns, did not prove that they

had passed from death unto life. They might still be in the gall of bitterness, and be enemies to God as Judas was; though they had very remarkable and special gifts as Judas had, for, no doubt, he wrought miracles, and in the name of Christ did many wonderful works. Gifts are but natural things, and they are given to the children of the flesh; but grace is supernatural, and whenever it is bestowed upon us, it proves that we are the children of God after the Spirit.

Remember, also, that you may have gifts, and yet you may still be under the power of sin. Alas! how many, who have the brightest natural gifts, are still using them in the cause of Satan; and even some, who have spiritual gifts of the kind I have described, yet, since they are not gracious as well as gifted, are doing mischief rather than good to the cause of Christ. To my great grief, I have known some who had a considerable gift in prayer, and who seemed to have a good knowledge of the Word, yet who, all the while, were living in some secret sin; and, by-and-by, it was found out, and they went out from us because they were never really of us. You may have the most brilliant gifts, and appear to be notable Christian workers, yet, for all that, you may still be under the dominion of sin. And so it comes to pass that a man may have all gifts, and all knowledge, and all faith, so that he could remove mountains, and he may even give his body to be burned; yet, if he has not love,—if he has not grace, he is still under the wrath of God. It must be an awful thing to preach like an apostle, and yet to be cast into hell like a devil;—to be able to instruct others, and yet never to enter into the kingdom;—to be able to pray in public, and yet never have any part or lot in the things of Christ, no union to him, no salvation by him. O brothers, do you understand and realize this? You may have great gifts, and yet go to hell; therefore, while they are worth the having under proper conditions, they are not one tenth so much worth the having as grace is, for he who has grace is not under the curse or condemnation of the law, or under the power of sin. Grace saves men; but all the gifts in the world, heaped together, cannot do that.

Note, next, that gifts bring corresponding responsibility with them; so they may even make it harder for a man to be saved; but grace saves the man. If I have ten talents, then I have a tenfold necessity upon me to be diligent in putting them out to interest. When men boast of their talents, what fools they are! It is as though the pack-horse should glory in the load he has to carry! Do you think a cab-horse is proud because he has to drag along a four-wheeler, and perhaps five people? Does he think himself more greatly privileged than an animal that only has to carry his rider? No, yet that is the case of the gifted person; for, the more gift, the more load, the more weight, the more burden; so gift is not a thing to be eager after, it is grace that we need; for, the more grace, the more strength of wing to mount with, the more fleetness of foot to run in the ways of God. Gift is but an addition to our load, but grace is strength with which to carry it. Covet the load if you may honour your Master by carrying it for him; but,

far more, covet the grace which shall enable you to bear it to his glory.

Further, gifts bring many men into danger, but grace never does. Gifted men are often in peril of being proud; but who, that is what he should be, is ever proud of his grace? If it be true grace, it will humble him. Gifted men, especially those who have great intellectual gifts, are very apt to be sophistical, and unwilling to receive the simple gospel. Some people, who have very big heads, and whose hearts are not as large as they might be, are bothered half their lives with doubts that never perplex those who, having more grace, accept whatever they find in the Word of God. It is a great gift, no doubt, to have a clear brain, to have an insight into deep mysteries, and to be able to solve difficult problems; yet I do not know that I am particularly covetous of it. I would prefer to cry, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God;" though I would rather come to Christ in a different spirit from that of Thomas, for "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Childlike faith is a diamond; and the faith that comes by reason is often, if it be a diamond at all, a very small one with a great flaw in it, and therefore not so good for reflecting the brightness of the pure light of truth. But grace does not bring us into any dangers; it neither puffs up nor yet unsettles. Therefore, while you covet the best gifts, covet grace yet more. Alas! alas! how many have had gifts, and have been made top-heavy by them! Their heads have been swimming through the height to which they have attained, while grace has kept the humble believer pursuing the even tenor of his way, doing good all his days, enjoying peace with God, and receiving an abundant entrance into the joy of his Master whom he faithfully served according to his ability.

Recollect, also, dear friends, that some may receive gifts, yet those gifts will not be tokens of God's love to them at all, for he may only have given them with a view to other people. Possibly, you hand to a porter at your door a parcel of valuables to carry, but that is no proof of your love to him; it is a very handsome present that you are sending to a friend upon his birthday. The love-token is to the person who gets it, not to the porter who carries it. I may come here to-night, and be nothing but God's porter to bring precious treasures to your souls; and in the case of many a minister, or many a Sunday-school teacher, it may be no token of love that God gives them his messages to carry. They are only the go-betweens, the porters; the love-token is to those who receive it. How I dread the thought that I should ever be among you simply like a butcher, as I have seen him stand at his great block of wood, chopping up meat for all who come! yet, all the while, he does not eat any of it himself. Perhaps he is a serving-man, whose wages are scanty, so that he gets but little meat for himself; it is a poor portion if one has to be a butcher, and yet is not himself able to feed; he is like a cook who scarcely tastes the dainties that she makes, and perhaps has no care to do so, but only makes them and serves them up for other people. It is a dreadful thing, in spiritual matters, to be nothing but God's go-between,—a ship that carries

a rich cargo, but the captain of the vessel does not own a stiver of all that is on board. It all belongs to somebody else; and he is but the carrier. Oh, remember, you who have great gifts, but no grace, are only like big ships with high sails, you are only God's carriers, and have no part nor lot in the matter; while he who gets grace is an heir of God, he has the power, the privilege, the right, to become a son of God.

Recollect also, dear friends, that though you covet gifts, and receive them, you will lose them one day. All the wisdom that a man has acquired he may lose in an instant by a crack from a stone on his skull. It is a great thing to have a good education, clear thought, and abilities for usefulness; yet a slight accident in a railway carriage may make a man as helpless as an imbecile; but, blessed be God, all the railway accidents in the world cannot take grace from us. No, neither on earth, nor in heaven, nor in hell, is there anyone who can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If you have grace, you will keep it, and it will keep you. But neither can you keep your gifts, nor can your gifts keep you; therefore is grace infinitely to be preferred to the most excellent of gifts.

Remember, yet again, that gifts cannot comfort a man when he is in deep depression of spirit, when he is sick, and especially when he is near to death. Many a man, lying on a sick-bed, has found comfort in the grace which God has given him; but there never was one who found comfort in his gifts. What a mighty preacher Paul was! Yet he wrote thus concerning one thought that crossed his mind: "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Ah! we may live for fifty years or more, and gather a great church, and do much good; but there is not a speck of the small dust of comfort in it all, for we recollect that God may have simply used us as builders use their scaffolds as long as they want them; and when the house is built, they take the scaffold down, and put the material away. God may use us in the same way if we have gifts without grace; but if we have grace, it will not be so with us. Grace unites us to Christ; it makes us living stones in the building of which he is the foundation. When we come to be sick, grace brings us the promises. Grace looks to Christ, grace gives us hope, grace gives us the foretaste and pledge of glory, and especially is it so with that sweet and blessed grace of love. The man who is full of grace, though he has not a solitary talent, and is all unknown, yet is a happy and blessed man; in poverty and in obscurity, in sickness and in death, he is blessed because his soul is full of the majestic grace of love divine.

Thus have I set before you, dear friends, the "more excellent way." God help you to run in it; and may you have much grace, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—813, 668, 649.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 7TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Lord's-day Evening, in the autumn of 1858.

"They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power."—Psalm cxlv. 11.

YOU have only to look at the preceding verse, and you will discover, in a single moment, who are the people here spoken of who shall speak of the glory of God's kingdom, and talk of his power. They are the saints: "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. *They* shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power." A saint will often be discovered by his conversation. He is a saint long before he knows it; he is a saint as being set apart unto salvation by God the Father in the covenant decree of election from all eternity; and he is a saint as being sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called. But he is more especially a saint as being sanctified by the quickening influence of the Holy Ghost, which renders him truly sanctified by making him holy, and bringing him into conformity with the image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet it is not at all times easy to discern a saint except by Scriptural marks and evidences. There is nothing particular about the countenance or dress of a saint to distinguish him from his fellows. The saints have faces like other men; sometimes, they are sadly marred and furrowed by cares and troubles which worldlings do not know. They wear the same kind of garments as other men wear; they may be rich or they may be poor; but, still, there are some marks whereby we can discern them, and one of the special ways of discovering a saint is by his conversation. As I often tell you, you may know the quality of the water in a well by that which is brought up in the bucket; so may we tell a Christian by his conversation.

It is, however, much to be regretted that true children of the Lord often talk too little of him. What is the conversation of half the professors of the present day? Honesty compels us to say that, in many cases, it is a mass of froth and falsehood, and, in many more cases, it is altogether objectionable; if it is not light and frivolous,

it is utterly apart from the gospel, and does not minister grace unto the hearers. I consider that one of the great lacks of the Church, nowadays, is not so much Christian preaching as Christian talking, —not so much Christian prayer in the prayer-meeting, as Christian conversation in the parlour. How little do we hear concerning Christ! You might go in and out of the houses of half the professors of religion, and you would never hear of their Master at all. You might talk with them from the first of January to the last of December; and if they happened to mention their Master's name, it would be, perhaps, merely as a compliment to him, or possibly by accident. Beloved, such things ought not to be. You and I, I am sure, are guilty in this matter; we all have need to reproach ourselves that we do not sufficiently remember the words of Malachi, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

Possibly some will ask, "Well, sir, how can we talk about religion? Upon what topic shall we converse? How are we to introduce it? It would not be polite, for instance, in the company with which we associate, to begin to say anything about the doctrines of grace, or about religious matters at all." Then, beloved, do not be polite; that is all I have to say in reply to such a remark as that. If it would be accounted contrary to etiquette to begin talking of the Saviour, cast etiquette to the winds, and speak about Christ somehow or other. The Christian is the aristocrat of the world; it is his place to make rules for society to obey,—not to stoop down, and conform to the regulations of society when they are contrary to the commands of his Master. He is the great Maker of laws; the King of kings, and Lord of lords; and he makes his people also to be kings. Kings make rules for ordinary men to obey; so must Christians do. They are not to submit to others; they must make others, by the worth of their principles, and the dignity of their character, submit to them. It is speaking too lightly of a Christian's dignity when we say that he dare not do the right, because it would not be fashionable. We care nothing for that, for "the fashion of this world passeth away," "but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

Another says, "What could I speak of? There are so few topics that would be suitable. I must not speak upon doctrinal subjects, for it would offend one of the party. They might hold different views; one might be a Wesleyan, one might be a Baptist, one might be an Independent, one a Calvinist, one an Arminian;—how could I talk so as to please all? If I spoke of election, most of them would attack me at once; if I began to speak of redemption, we should soon differ on that subject, and I would not like to engender controversy." Beloved, engender controversy rather than have wrong conversation; better dispute over truth than agree about lies. Better, I say, is it to dispute concerning good doctrine, far more profitable is it to talk of the Word of God, even in a controversial manner, than to turn utterly away from it, and neglect it.

But, let me tell you, there is one point on which all Christians agree, and that is concerning the person, the work, and the blessed offices of our Saviour. Go where you will, professors, if they are genuine Christians, will always agree with you if you begin to talk about your Saviour; so you need not be afraid that you will provoke controversy; but supposing the mention of your Saviour's name does provoke dispute, then let it be provoked. And if your Master's truth offends the gentlemen to whom you speak of it, let them be offended. His name we must confess; of his glory we will continually talk, for it is written in our text, "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power."

Now, then, first, here is *a subject for conversation:* "they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power." Secondly, we will try to find out *some causes why Christians must speak concerning this blessed subject;* and then, thirdly, I will very briefly refer to *the effect of our talking more of Christ's kingdom and power.*

I. First, here is A SUBJECT FOR CONVERSATION: "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power." Here are two subjects; for God, when he puts grace into the heart, does not lack a subject upon which we shall converse.

First, we are to converse concerning *the glory of Christ's kingdom.* The glory of Christ's kingdom should ever be a subject of discourse to a Christian; he should always be speaking, not merely of Christ's priesthood or his prophesying, but also of his kingdom, which has lasted from all eternity; and especially of that glorious kingdom of grace in which we now live, and of that brighter kingdom of millennial glory, which soon shall come upon this world, to conquer all other kingdoms, and break them in pieces.

The psalmist furnishes us with some divisions of this subject, all of which illustrate the glory of Christ's kingdom. In the 12th verse he says, "To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts." The glory of a kingdom depends very much on the achievements of that kingdom; so, in speaking of the glory of Christ's kingdom, we are *to make known his mighty acts.* We think that the glory of Old England—at least, our historians would say so,—rests upon the great battles she has fought, and the victories she has won. We turn over the records of the past, and we see her, in one place, vanquishing thousands of Frenchmen at Agincourt; at another period, we see the fleets of the Spanish Armada scattered by the breath of God. We turn to different battles, and we trace victory after victory, dotted along the page of history, and we say that this is the glory of our kingdom. Now, Christian, when you speak of the glory of your Master's kingdom, you must tell something of his great victories;—how he routed Pharaoh, and cut the Egyptian Rahab, and wounded the dragon of the Nile; how he slew all the firstborn in one night; how, at his command, the Red Sea was divided; how the children of Israel crossed over in safety, and the chivalry of Egypt was drowned in the flood. Talk ye also of how God overcame Amalek, and smote Moab; how he utterly cut off those nations that warred against Israel, and caused them to pass

away for ever. Tell how Babylon and Nineveh were made to rue the day when God smote them with his iron hand. Tell ye to the world how God hath crushed great nations and overcome proud monarchs; how Sennacherib's hosts were left dead within their camp, and how those that have risen up in rebellion against God have found his arm too mighty for their strength and prowess. Tell of the terrible acts of our Saviour's kingdom; record his victories in this world; nor cease there. Tell how our Saviour routed the devil in the wilderness when he came to tempt him. Tell how he—

"All his foes to ruin hurled,
Sin, Satan, earth, death, hell, the world."

Tell how he hath bruised the head of Satan. Tell how death has lost his prey. Tell how hell's deepest dungeons have been visited, and the power of the prince of darkness utterly cut off. Tell ye how antichrist himself shall sink like a millstone in the flood. Tell how false systems of superstition shall flee away, like birds of night when the sun rises too brightly for their dim sight to bear. Tell ye all this, tell it in Askelon and in Gath; tell it the wide world o'er, that the Lord of hosts is the God of battles; he is the conqueror of men and of devils; he is Master in his own dominions. Tell ye the glory of his kingdom, and rehearse "his mighty acts." Christian, exhaust that theme if thou canst.

Then, in speaking of the glory of Christ's kingdom, the next thing we talk of is *its glorious majesty*. The psalmist further says, in the 12th verse, that the saints shall not only "make known God's mighty acts, but also the glorious majesty of his kingdom." Part of the glory of England consists, not in her achievements, but in the state and majesty which surround her. In ancient times especially, monarchs were noted for the great pomp with which they were surrounded. Thousands of houses must be razed to the ground to find a site for one dwelling for a king. His palace must be gorgeous with riches; its halls must be paved with marble, and its walls set with jewels; fountains must sparkle there; there must be beds of eider on which monarchs may recline; music, such as other ears do not hear, wines from the uttermost regions of the earth, and all manner of delights, are reserved for kings; precious stones and gems adorn their crowns; and everything that is rich and rare must be brought to deck the monarch, and increase the majesty of his kingdom.

Well, Christian, when speaking of Christ's kingdom, you are to talk of its majesty. Tell of your Saviour's glorious majesty; speak of the many crowns that he wears upon his head. Tell of the crown of grace which he wears continually; tell of the crown of victory which perpetually proclaims the triumphs he has won over the foe; tell of the crown of love wherewith his Father crowned him in the day of his espousals to his Church,—the crown which he has won by ten thousand hearts which he has broken, and untold myriads of spirits which he has bound up. Tell to all mankind that the glory of your Saviour's majesty far exceeds the glories of the ancient kings of Assyria and India. Tell that, before his

throne above, there stand, in glorious state, not princes, but angels; not servants in gorgeous liveries, but cherubs, with wings of fire, waiting to obey his mighty behests. Tell that his palace is floored with gold, and that he has no need of lamps, or even of the sun, to enlighten it, for he himself is the light thereof. Tell ye to the whole world what is the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

But once more, Christians, in speaking of the glory of Christ's kingdom, you must talk of *its duration*, for much of the honour of the kingdom depends upon the time it has lasted. In verse 13, the psalmist says, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." If one should say to you, concerning an earthly monarch, "Our king sits upon a throne which his ancestors have occupied for many generations;" tell him that a thousand years are to your King but as one day. If another tells you that his king has crowns which were worn by kings a thousand years ago, smile in his face, and tell him that a thousand years are as nothing in Christ's sight. When they speak of the antiquity of churches, tell them that you belong to a very ancient Church. If they talk to you of the venerable character of the religion which they profess, tell them that you believe in a very venerable religion, for yours is a religion which was from everlasting. Christ's kingdom was set up long before this world was brought forth; when as yet neither sun, nor moon, nor stars, had been created, Christ's kingdom was firmly established. I wish Christians would more often talk about the glory of their Master's kingdom with regard to the time it has lasted. If you would begin to talk of the past history of God's Church, you would never have to exclaim, "I have said all that can be said about it, and I have nothing more to say." You would need eternity to keep on going back, back, back, until you came to God alone; and then you might say,—

> "In his mighty breast I see,
> Eternal thoughts of love to me."

Then you may speak concerning the future duration of your Master's kingdom. I suppose, if you were to talk much about the second coming of Christ, you would be laughed at, you would be thought diseased in your brain; for there are so few nowadays who receive that great truth, that, if we speak of it with much enthusiasm, people turn away, and say, "Ah! we do not know much about that subject, but Mr. So-and-so has turned his brain through thinking so much about it." Men are, therefore, half-afraid to speak of such a subject; but, beloved, we are not afraid to talk of it, for Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and we may talk of the glory of the future as well as of the past. Some say that Christ's Church is in danger. There are many churches that are in danger; and the sooner they tumble down, the better; but the Church of Christ has a future that shall never end; it has a future that shall never become dim; it has a future which shall eternally progress in glory. Her glory now is the glory of the morning twilight; it soon shall be the glory of the blazing noon. Her riches

now are but the riches of the newly-opened mine; soon she shall have riches much more abundant and far more valuable than any she has at present. She is now young; by-and-by, she will come, not to her dotage, but to her maturity. She is like a fruit that is ripening, a star that is rising, a sun that is shining more and more unto the perfect day; and soon she will blaze forth in all her glory, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." O Christian, here is a topic worthy of thy conversation! Talk of the glory of thy Master's kingdom. Often speak of it while others amuse themselves with stories of sieges and battles; while they are speaking of this or that or the other event in history, tell them the history of the monarchy of the King of kings; speak to them concerning the fifth great monarchy in which Jesus Christ shall reign for ever and ever.

But I must not forget briefly to hint at the other subject of the saints' conversation: "*and shall talk of thy power.*" It is not simply of Christ's kingdom of which we are to speak, but also of his power. Here, again, the psalmist gives us something which will help us to a division of our subject. In the 14th and 15th verses, mention is made of three kinds of power of which we ought to speak: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season."

First, the Christian should speak of *Christ's upholding power.* What a strange expression this is, "The Lord upholdeth all that fall"! Yet remember John Bunyan's quaint old saying,—

> "He that is down needs fear no fall;
> He that is low, no pride;
> He that is humble, ever shall
> Have God to be his guide."

So David says, "The Lord upholdeth all that fall." What a singular expression! How can he hold up those that fall? Yet those that fall, in this sense, are the only persons that stand. It is a remarkable paradox; but it is true. The man who stands on his feet, and says, "I am mighty,—I am strong enough to stand alone;"—down he will go; but he who falls into Christ's arms, he who says,—

> "But, oh! for this no power have I,
> My strength is at thy feet to lie;"—

that man shall not fall. We may well talk, then, of Christ's upholding power. Tell it to Christians; tell how he kept you when your feet were going swift to hell; how, when fierce temptations did beset you, your Master drove them all away; how, when the enemy was watching, he compassed you with his mighty strength; how, when the arrows fell thickly around you, his mighty arm did hold the shield before you, and so preserved you from them all. Tell how he saved you from death, and delivered your feet from falling by making you, first of all, fall down prostrate before him.

Next, talk of *his exalting power:* "He raiseth up all those that

be bowed down." Oh, how sweet it is, beloved, sometimes to talk of God's exalting power after we have been bowed down! I love to come into this pulpit, and talk to you as I would in my own room. I make no pretensions to preaching at all, but simply tell you what I happen to feel just now. Oh, how sweet it is to feel the raisings of God's grace when you have been bowed down! Cannot some of us tell that, when we have been bowed down beneath a load of affliction, so that we could not even move, the everlasting arms have been around us, and have lifted us up? When Satan has put his foot on our back, and we have said, "We shall never be raised up any more," the Lord has come to our rescue. If we were only to talk on that subject in our conversation with one another, no Christian need have spiritless conversation in his parlour. But, nowadays, you are so afraid to speak of your own experience, and the mercy of God to you, that you will talk any stuff and nonsense rather than that. But, I beseech you, if you would do good in the world, rehearse God's deeds of raising up those that be bowed down.

Moreover, talk of God's *providing power:* "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season." We ought often to speak of how God provides for his creatures in providence. Why should we not tell how God has taken us out of poverty, and made us rich; or, if he has not done that for us, how he has supplied our wants day by day in an almost miraculous manner? Some persons object to such a book as Huntington's "Bank of Faith," and I have heard some respectable people call it "The Bank of Nonsense." Ah! if they had ever been brought into Huntington's condition, they would see that it was indeed a bank of faith, and not a bank of nonsense; the nonsense was in those who read it, in their unbelieving hearts, not in the book itself. And he who has been brought into many straits and trials, and has been divinely delivered out of them, would find that he could write a "Bank of Faith" as good as Huntington's if he liked to do so; for he has had as many deliverances, and he could rehearse the mighty acts of God, who has opened his hands, and supplied the wants of his needy child. Many of you have been out of a situation, and you have cried to God to furnish you with one, and you have had it. Have you not sometimes been brought so low, through painful affliction, that you could not rest? And could you not afterwards say, "I was brought low, and he helped me"? Yes; "I was brought low, and he helped me out of my distress"? Yes; I see some of you nodding your heads, as much as to say, "We are the men who have passed through that experience; we have been brought into great straits, but the Lord has delivered us out of them all." Then do not be ashamed to tell the story. Let the world hear that God provides for his people. Go, speak of your Father. Do as the child does, who, when he has a little cake given to him, will take it out, and say, "Father gave me this." Do so with all your mercies; go and tell all the world that you have a good Father, a gracious Father, a heavenly Provider; and though he gives you a hand-basket portion, and you only live from hand to

mouth, yet tell how graciously he gives it, and that you would not change your blest estate for all the world calls good or great.

II. I must be brief in speaking upon THE CAUSES WHICH WILL MAKE CHRISTIANS TALK OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM AND HIS POWER.

One cause is, that *it is the kingdom of their own King.* We do not expect French people to talk much about the victories of the English; and I suppose there is no Russian who would pay very many compliments to the prowess of our arms; but they will all talk about their own monarchs. Well, that is the reason why a Christian should speak of the glory of his Master's kingdom, and tell of his power, because it is the kingdom of his own King. Jesus Christ may be or may not be another man's King; but, certainly he is mine; he is the Monarch to whom I yield absolute submission. I am no longer an alien and a stranger, but I am one of his subjects; and I will talk concerning him, because he is my King.

Secondly, the Christian must talk of the King's victories, *because all those victories were won for him*; he recollects that his Master never fought a battle for himself,—never slew an enemy for himself. He slew them all for his people. And if for me,—a poor abject worm,—my Saviour did this, shall I not talk of the glory of his kingdom, when he won all that glory for me? Will I not speak of his power, when all that power was exercised for me? It was all for me. When he died, he died for me; when he suffered, he suffered for me; and when he led captivity captive, he did it for me. Therefore, I must and will speak of his dear name. I cannot help testifying to the glory of his grace in whatever company I may be.

Again, the Christian must talk of it, *because he himself has had a good share in fighting some of the battles.* You know how old soldiers will "shoulder their crutch, and tell how fields were won." The soldier, home from the Crimea, when he reads the accounts of the war, says, "Ah! I know that trench; I worked in it myself. I know the Redan; I was one of the men who attacked it." He is interested because he had a share in the battle. "*Quorum pars magna fui*," said the old soldier, in the days of Virgil; so we, if we have had a part in the battle, like to talk concerning it. And, beloved, it is this which makes our battles dear to us; we help to fight them. Though there was one battle which our great Captain fought alone, and "of the people there was none with him," yet, in other victories, he has permitted his people to help to crush the dragon's head. Recollect that you have been a soldier in the army of the Lord; and that, in the last day, when he gives away the medals in heaven, you will have one; when he gives away the crowns, you will have one. We can talk about the battles, for we were in them; we can speak of the victories, for we helped to win them. It is to our own praise as well as to our Master's when we talk of his wondrous acts.

But the best reason why the Christian should talk of his Master is this, *if he has Christ in his heart, the truth must come out;* he cannot help it. The best reason in all the world is the woman's

reason, who said she should do it because she would do it. So it often happens that the Christian cannot give us much reason why he must talk about his Saviour, except that he cannot help it, and he will not try to help it. It is in him, and it must come out. If God has put a fire inside a man's heart, do you think it can be kept down? If we have grace in our souls, will it never come out in conversation? God does not put his candles in lanterns through which they cannot be seen, but he sets them on candlesticks; he does not build his cities in valleys, but he puts them on hills, so that they cannot be hid. So he will not allow his grace to be concealed. A Christian man cannot help being discovered. None of you ever knew a secret believer,—a secret Christian. "Oh!" you say, "I am sure I have known such a man." But, look you, he could not have been a secret believer if you knew him, he could not be wholly secret; the fact that you knew him proves that he could not have been a secret Christian. If a man says that nobody knows a thing, and yet he knows it, he contradicts himself. You cannot, then, know a secret believer, and you never will. There may be, indeed, some who are secret for a time, but they always have to come out, like Joseph of Arimathæa, when he went and begged the body of Jesus. Ah! there are some of you sitting in your pews who fancy I shall never discover you; but I shall see you in the vestry by-and-by. Some of you keep on coming Sunday after Sunday, and you say, "Well, I must go by-and-by, and make a profession of faith." Yes, you will not be able to sit there long; if you have the grace of God within you, you will be obliged to come out, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ by being baptized in his name. Why not do so without further delay? If you love your Lord's name, come out at once, and own it.

III. Lastly, WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT OF OUR TALKING MORE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM AND POWER?

The first effect would be *that the world would believe us more.* The world says, "What a parcel of hypocrites Christian people are!" And they are about right concerning a good many of you. The world says, "Why, just look at them! They profess a deal of religion; but if you hear them talk, they do not speak differently from other people. They sing loudly enough, it is true, when they go to church or chapel; but when do you hear them sing at home? They go to the prayer-meeting; but have they a prayer-meeting at their own family altar? Believe them to be Christians? No! Their lives give the lie to their doctrines, and we do not believe them." If we oftener talked of Christ, I am sure the world would think us to be better Christians, and they would, no doubt, say so.

Again, if our conversations were more concerning Christ, *we, as Christian men, should grow faster, and be more happy.* What is the reason of the bickerings and jealousies between Christians? It is this, because they do not know one another. Mr. Jay used to tell a story about a man going out, one foggy morning, and seeing something coming in the fog; he thought it was a monster. But, by-and-by, as he came nearer, he exclaimed, "Oh, dear me! that's my brother John!" So it often happens, when we see people at a

distance, and hold no spiritual conversation with them, we think they are monsters. But when we begin to talk together, and get near to one another, we say, "Why, it is brother John, after all!" There are more true brethren about us than we dream of. Then, I say, let your conversation, in all companies, wherever you may be, be so seasoned with salt that a man may know you to be a Christian. In this way, you would remove bickerings better than by all the sermons that could be preached, and be promoting a true Evangelical Alliance far more excellent and efficient than all the alliances which man can form.

Again, if we oftener talked of Christ like this, *how useful we might be in the salvation of souls!* O beloved, how few souls have some of you won to Christ! It says, in the Canticles, "There is not one barren among them;" but are not some of you barren,—without spiritual children? It was pronounced as a curse upon one of old that he should die childless. Oh! methinks that, though the Christian is always blessed, it is half a curse to die spiritually childless. There are some of you who are childless to-night. You never were the means of the conversion of a soul in all your lives. You hardly remember having tried to win anyone for the Saviour. You are good religious people so far as your outward conduct is concerned. You go to the house of God, but you never concern yourselves about winning souls for Jesus. O my God, let me die when I can no longer be the means of saving souls! If I can be kept out of heaven a thousand years, if thou wilt give me souls as my wages, let me still speak for thee; but if there be no more sinners to be converted,—no more to be brought in by my ministry,—then let me depart, and be "with Christ, which is far better."

Oh, think of the crowns that are in heaven! "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." So many souls, so many gems! Have you ever thought what it would be to wear in heaven a starless crown? All the saints will have crowns, but those who win souls will have a star in their crown for every soul. Some of you, my friends, will wear a crown without a star; would you like that? You will be happy, you will be blessed, you will be satisfied, I know, when you will be there; but can you bear the thought of dying childless,—of having none in heaven who shall be begotten unto Christ by you,—never having travailed in birth for souls,—never having brought any to Christ? How can you bear to think of it? Then, if you would win souls, beloved, talk about Jesus. There is nothing like talking of him, to lead others to him. I read of the conversion of a servant, the other day. She was asked how she came to know the Lord. "Well," she said, "my master, at dinner, happened to make some simple observation to his sister across the table." The remark certainly was not addressed to the servant; and her master had no notion that she was listening; yet his word was blessed to her. It is well to talk behind the door that which you do not mind hearing afterwards in the street; it is good to speak that in the closet which you are not ashamed to listen to from the housetop, for you will have to listen to it from

the housetop by-and-by, when God shall come and call you to account for every idle word you have spoken.

Souls are often converted through godly conversation. Simple words frequently do more good than long sermons. Disjointed, unconnected sentences are often of more use than the most finely polished periods or rounded sentences. If you would be useful, let the praises of Christ be ever on your tongue; let him live on your lips. Speak of him always; when thou walkest by the way, when thou sittest in thy house, when thou risest up, and even when thou liest down, it may be that thou hast someone to whom it is possible that thou mayest yet whisper the gospel of the grace of God. Many a sister has been brought to know the Saviour by a sister's pleadings that were only heard in the silence of the night. God give you, beloved, to fulfil our text! "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power." They *shall* do it, mark you; God will make you do it if you are his people. Go and do it willingly. Begin, from this time forth, and keep on doing it for ever. Say, concerning other conversation, "Begone far hence! avaunt! This shall be my constant and only theme." Be like the harp of old Anacreon, which would never sound any other note but that of love. The harpist wished to sing of Cadmus, and of mighty men of wisdom, but his harp would resound of love alone. Be, then, like Anacreon's harp,—sing of Christ alone! Christ alone! Christ alone! Jesus, Jesus only! Make him the theme of your conversation, for "they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power." God give you grace so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM CXXXVII.

Verses 1, 2. *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*

Babylon was full of canals and rivers; the captive Israelites sought out lonely places where they might be away from their oppressors, and might in the company of their countrymen pour out the sad stream of their griefs and sorrows. "The rivers of Babylon" seemed congenial to them, and they mingled their tears with the flowing waters. They "sat down" as if they felt they were to be there a long while, and were not soon to go back to their own land; and they "wept"—not simply because of their banishment and their woes, but also because of the mournful condition of their beloved Zion, which had been ravaged by the Chaldeans, ploughed as a field, and given over to desolation. Some of these poor captives had been singers in the courts of the Lord's house which had been burnt with fire, and others had brought their "harps" with them into their captivity; but they could not find any music in their hearts, and therefore they fetched no melodious notes out of their harp-strings. They did not break their harps, however, for they might want them some day, so they hung them up on the weeping willows which abounded by the water-courses. Then came one of the sharpest trials they had ever had,—a piece of bitter cruelty on the part of their oppressors, who had no compassion upon the poor prisoners whom they had taken from their own land.

3. *For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*

As no cups except those that were taken out of God's holy house would do for Belshazzar when he wanted to make himself drunk, so no music would suit these heathen captors of Israel but the songs of God's house: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." These poor people were crestfallen and utterly broken down, yet their enemies cried, "Make mirthful music for us, sing us one of your sacred songs." They only wanted to laugh at it, or, at the very best, to listen to it simply as a piece of music that they might criticize, so they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." But the captives could not and would not sing for any such purpose. Zion's songs were not meant to be sung for mere amusement, nor were her chants intended to be made the theme of mockery and ridicule by the ungodly.

4, 5. *How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

"No," they said, "if we were to make mirth for the Babylonians, we should be doing serious damage to Zion, we should be traitors to Jerusalem;" so the harpers said, "Sooner than we will play a tune to make mirth for you, let our right hands become paralyzed."

6. *If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;—*

They said it each one for himself; they would sooner be dumb than sing these sacred songs for the amusement of the ungodly revellers who had gathered round about them. Instead of a song, they offered a prayer which must have sounded terribly in the ears of those who mocked them; it was a fierce prayer,—a prayer made under a very different dispensation from that under which we live,—a prayer by a patriot who had seen his wife murdered, and his children dashed to pieces, and he prays thus:—

6, 7. *If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.*

These Edomites, who ought to have been like brothers to the Jews, were their most ferocious enemies, and they stirred up the Chaldeans to be more terribly cruel than they otherwise would have been.

8, 9. *O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.*

For these people had gone all over the world, wherever they could, murdering and mutilating. Tens of thousands of little children had they brutally killed, multitudes of women had they ravished, a vast number of cities had they destroyed. They were the scourges of all nations; and, therefore, moved to righteous indignation, the Jews felt that anybody who should overthrow that city of Babylon, and put to death its inhabitants, would be doing good service to the rest of mankind. And, mark you, all this came to pass in due time. When Cyrus turned aside the waters of the river which had been Babylon's great protection, and left the river-bed quite dry, he marched his troops right into the centre of the city; and when the Babylonians, to defend themselves and a part of the city, were driven to great straits, we are told by historians that they themselves destroyed their own wives and children, calling them useless mouths, that they might be able to defend themselves a little longer from the sword of Cyrus, so that, literally, it came to pass that the man who had destroyed his own children thought himself happy to be rid of them that he might maintain the fight. How dreadful is God when he deals with nations that have been cruel and ferocious! Go ye to Babylon this day, and see what ruinous heaps he hath made, what desolation he hath wrought in that land.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WORDLESS PRAYERS HEARD IN HEAVEN.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 14TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, September 8th, 1881.

"When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them."—Isaiah xli. 17.

NOTICE, dear friends, that this double promise to the poor and needy stands in connection with other great promises which guarantee the gift of wonderful strength and blessing to God's people. These promises seem to me to be such as the mightiest servant of God might well desire to have fulfilled in himself. Look, for instance, at the one in the 15th and 16th verses: "Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel." What a great promise that is! How it makes the child of God to participate in the greatness of Jehovah's strength! The picture here drawn is a very remarkable one. Here is a man—a poor, feeble man—so strengthened by God that he not only threshes wheat, but he threshes mountains; nor does he find that the gigantic enterprise is beyond the strength imparted to him. The rocks and the hills are turned to chaff; nor is that all that happens to them, for this man, divinely strengthened, takes up a colossal winnowing fan, and sets Alps, Andes, Himalayas, flying just like the small dust from the threshing-floor. This is grand work, and it needs a man of God when he has come to the fulness of his strength through the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

Whenever we quote a great promise like that, it usually depresses some little one in the Lord's family. He (or, more likely, she) begins to say, "But what can I do? I cannot thresh mountains. Nay, rather, it seems to me that Satan is threshing me, and desiring to have me that he may sift me as wheat; and, instead of me holding the winnowing fan in my hand, it is the winnowing fan that is

being used upon me, and what I thought was a fine heap of wheat is being blown away, and I am afraid there will be few precious grains left to lie upon the floor. Ah, me! Ah, me!" Well, now, our God has a gracious way of caring for all his children; and, from the very nature of him, I am quite certain that, if one of his children could be forgotten, it would not be the little one. You mothers know that, if ever there was one member of the household left out in the cold when you closed the door at night, it would not be the baby; you would be sure first of all to see that the wee mite was safely housed; and if it were possible that the divine mind could pass over and forget one of the beloved family, it certainly would not be the little one or the tried one. There are special promises for the child of God in the time of trial: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The presence of God is with all his chosen ones at all times; but if ever there could be an exception to that rule, it certainly would not be in the case of those who are tried, and troubled, and depressed. Nay; the exception would be all the other way. If the good Shepherd left the ninety-and-nine safely folded in the wilderness, he would be sure to go after the one sheep that was lost, —the weak and wounded one, the feeble and footsore one, even though the cause of its sufferings might be its own guilty wanderings. Oh, the splendour of the love of God! There is nothing to be compared with it under heaven, or even in heaven itself; it stands alone and unapproachable. He is ever considering those amongst his people who are downcast, and weak, and broken-hearted; and I think that the promise of our text specially comes in, not for you mountain-threshers,—not for you who are made so strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, but for some who cannot as yet get a grip of that grand word of his to which I have referred. Here comes in this sweet promise; "when the poor and needy" are not trying to thresh mountains, but are looking for that which is needful for the supply of their own personal wants,—seeking water;—when they are in too low a condition to be able to rise to the dignity of service, but are just like poor Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness, seeking water;—when they have fallen into such a sad and sorrowful state of heart that, instead of testifying to the goodness of God, they cannot testify to anything, for "their tongue faileth for thirst;"—it is then, in their extremity, that the blessed promises shall come to them: "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

I am going to follow the good Shepherd's example, and to leave the ninety-and-nine,—you brethren and sisters who are happy and joyful in the Lord. I must leave you to take care of yourselves; or, rather, the Lord will take care of you. I want just now to go after that one sheep that is lost; and I should not wonder if there are not here more than one out of every hundred in the condition which our text describes. If so, may the Spirit of God cause the message to reach the hearts of all such sorrowing ones, that God

may again be glorified in the abundance of his mercy toward them. Let us begin at the beginning of the text, and consider it from point to point very briefly. We will start with these people where the text starts with them.

I. Here is, first, POVERTY OF CONDITION: "When the poor and needy seek water."

This description, of course, applies to poverty of spiritual condition; does it not describe you, my brother, my sister? Sometimes, we say that we are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" though, all the while, we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" but there are other times when, consciously, among the poor, we are the poorest; and among the needy, our need puts us in the very front rank.

Certainly, I think that most of us here would take the position of great poverty *as to anything like merit.* What have we ever done that can commend us to God? When we have done all that our Master commanded, we must still say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." But we have not obeyed all his commands, by a very long way. Self-complacency may be a very pleasant feeling to cherish; but he who walks near to God is a stranger to it. If ever God honours one of his children in public, I bear witness that he has a way of flogging him behind the door, so as to make him feel that he has nothing wherein to glory, save only in the Lord. What hast even thou done, thou who hast won many souls for the Saviour? Thou mayest thank God that he has thus honoured thee; but beware lest thou dost ever take any credit for it to thyself, for that would be a strange perversion of the truth. What if thou hast trained up that family of thine in the fear of God, and hast seen the divine benediction resting upon thy house? That is well; but art thou the god of thy house? What wouldst thou have been, and what would thy house have been, if it had not been for the mercy of God to thee and thine? Looking back upon the whole of our life, we have to thank God for it; and we must not let him be robbed of any of the thanksgiving that is due unto him; but as for ourselves, the only fit tribute to all that we have done is a tear. Let us thank God that he blots out our faults and our failings with the precious blood of his dear Son; but let us also weep over them bitter tears of regret that we should ever have sinned against him. If any here present have any merits in which they think they can glory, there are, on the other hand, some of us who could sit down in dust and ashes, and cry out in the agony of our souls, for we are poverty-stricken to the last degree as to anything of merit in and of ourselves.

Yes, and we have poverty of another kind, namely, *as to anything like strength.* Not that we would plead that as an excuse for not doing much for our Lord; for, albeit that we are fully conscious of our own weakness, we never yet learnt that God's law was limited by human power. We believe that it is our duty to do thousands of things which, by reason of our impotence, we never do, and never, perhaps, can do. Still, the claims of duty remain the same as they always were; for, if we have sinned away our power, God has not

therefore lost any of his rights. We ought to have been perfect. Brethren, I count that, if you and I had lived absolutely perfect lives, we should not even then have rendered a due return to God for the great debt we owe to him. If we have preached Christ's gospel, we ought to have preached it like flaming seraphs. If we have suffered for Christ's sake, we ought to have been ready to die like martyrs. We ought, in our lives, to have reproduced the life of Christ; but when we struggle to attain to this high ideal, there is a shrunken sinew that makes us like Jacob, halt upon our thigh; and there is another shrunken sinew that makes us drop our arm, and there is scarcely a part of our mental and spiritual constitution which does not make us cry, with Paul, "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

Truly, we are poverty-stricken as to our strength. The smallest sin is too much for us if God be gone from us; the slightest temptation blows us over, like children who are weak upon their legs; only God can sustain us, and we need constantly to hear our Saviour say to us, as he said to his disciples, "Without me ye can do nothing." When we first heard that message, we used to think, "Oh! but surely we can do a little." Yet, every day, that word "nothing" seems to toll the funeral knell of all self-confidence. Christ still says to us, "Without me ye can do nothing;" and we know that what he says is true. Some of us are feeling the truth of this sentence, and we are humbled in the dust as we realize that we are indeed poor and needy as to strength.

Then, brethren, *as to grace*, many of the children of God are, to their shame, obliged to confess that they are poor and needy where they ought to be rich, and where they might be rich;—poor in patience, poor in courage, poor in faith, poor in hope, poor in love, poor in private prayer, poor in public influence, poor in every way. Although the grace of God can make us so rich spiritually that we may be happy ourselves, and be able also to be the means of blessing others, there are many of God's children who seem scarcely to have a penny of spending-money, and they never appear to go to the King's treasury, and dip their hand in, and take out great handfuls of the precious gold of grace. They might do so if they would; but, alas! they continue miserably poor through their own fault. So this last confession must be made very humbly, as indeed the others I have mentioned ought to be; and perhaps I am speaking right home to some brothers and sisters here when I say that, as to merit, as to strength, and even as to grace, you feel yourselves to be "poor and needy."

II. Our next remark is concerning URGENCY OF NEED.

"When the poor and needy seek"—what? Money? No; that is only to be poor and needy. Bread? Ay; that shows a harder poverty than merely being "poor and needy." But it is not bread that these poor and needy ones are seeking, but "water." Why, that is generally to be had for nothing,—a drink of water. It must be very hard times indeed when poor souls are in such a state that

they are longing for water, and seeking for it afar, as though there were none near at hand. Brothers, sisters, are any of you in such a condition, so poor and needy, that you are sighing after the living water? Though you have drunk of it before, you are still sighing for more of it, and feel as if you could not tell where to find it.

This is an urgent necessity, *for it touches a vital point.* A man can exist without money, he can live without garments, he could live longer without bread than he could without water; for you may palliate hunger, but the pangs of thirst are awful; so those have said who have had to endure it on a raft at sea. Water is a vital necessity of our being, and therefore God has appended to it a feverishness, an agony, a burning, longing, and intense desire to obtain it. Thirst is something dreadful; are you, my brother, my sister, thirsting for God, for the living God? Are you crying to him, with David, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is"? Do you feel that you must get a visitation from God, or else your soul will die? Have you been in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, and have you come here saying, "Lord, I seek a draught—a necessary draught of living water, and I want it to drink; but I am so poverty-stricken that I cannot buy it. I am so weak that I cannot go far to find it. I am so ignorant that I scarcely know where to look for it. Lord, I am brought to this point; it is not any fancied grace that I want, it is not some high-soaring aspiration after perfection that I cherish, but I need even grace enough to keep my faith alive. I want, just now, such a draught of water from the well as shall enable me to realize that I am a child of God"?

Do I address one in whom this vital necessity has become *an agonizing thirst?* I think that I shall speak your experience when I say that I have sometimes known what it was to feel that I would sacrifice my eyes, and be blind, if I might but again get near my God. What mattered it that one had to lie in bed and suffer, if one might but know that God's countenance was lifted up upon his soul, and that joy and gladness were in his spirit? They who have never lost the consciousness of fellowship with God are to be envied. May there be many such here! But, if any have once known it, and have lost it, I hope that they will be consumed by a vehement desire to have it back again, that they may once more drink of the water which is infinitely better than that in "the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate." It were worth while that our blood were shed to get a draught of that living water again. It is truly sad when any child of God has sorrowfully to say,—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

"What peaceful hours I then enjoy'd!
How sweet their memory still!
But now I find an aching void
The world can never fill."

Thank God that the void does ache, and that the world cannot fill it. If you, dear friend, have an agonizing desire to drink the water of life, you are the person to whom my text applies: "When the poor and needy seek water."

Further, this is *an immediate necessity.* When a man's tongue faileth for thirst, and he seeks water, he wants it at once. When he is perishing for lack of water, he is not content if someone tells him that he shall find it by-and-by; he wants to find it at once. "Water! Water!" he cries; "give me water;" but as long as a man can cry as loudly as I have just done, he can wait a little while; but if he gets to this point, that his tongue faileth for thirst, then he needs it immediately, or he will die. O child of God, if you have lost the presence of your God, you want to find it again while you are in that pew; you would not like to go home without having a sight of your Father's face, would you? And if you are in such a desperate state that you feel that you must have it, then you shall have it, depend upon it. I pray that you may be brought to such a condition that you shall be ready to die of sickness of heart unless your hope be speedily fulfilled, and you can once again behold your God.

III. The third step down—and it is a very long one, is this, DISAPPOINTMENT OF HOPE: "When the poor and needy seek water, *and there is none.*"

Ah! "there is none" *even where they have found it before.* They have sought it in the right place, they have gone where they used to go, where there are wells of water; yet they are bitterly disappointed, for "there is none." Have not some of you at times found it so in attending the means of grace? You have gone again to the same place where, aforetime, your heart was refreshed as you drank deep draughts of the living water; you listened to the same preacher whom you heard there before; and, perhaps, to others there was as much sweetness as ever in his message, but to you there was none. Does not the preacher himself know what it is, sometimes, to have a subject that is just like a springing well; and then, at another time, to find that he may pump as long as he pleases, but there is not a drop of water comes? If it is so with the preacher, it is certainly so with the hearers. Sometimes, there is an unction from the Holy One resting upon the Word, so that it is like the ointment from the alabaster box, the heavenly perfume fills the whole house. At another time, it is the same truth that is preached, and by the same lips; and, possibly, with the same earnest desire for a blessing; yet the blessing is not given. "The wind bloweth" not only "where it listeth," but as it listeth; and there are times when not a breath of the heavenly breeze stirs the still air; and then, when "the poor and needy seek water" even where they used to find it, "there is none."

It makes their case even more disappointing when they have, side by side with them, *others who are seeking water, and finding it,* yet "there is none" for them. Have you never been to the Lord's table,—say, with your own wife,—and when she has been going home, she has said, "Oh, what a precious communion service! Was

not the Lord manifestly among his people in the breaking of bread?"—and you have hardly liked to tell her that you have not seen the Lord even in his own ordinance? Your eyes have been holden, you have been sitting there sighing and crying, and no joy has come to you. I am sure it is often so in the hearing of the Word; it is so in the private reading of the Scriptures; it is so in all those means of grace which God does bless to his people. We find him sometimes blessing one, and missing others; just as, sometimes, the rains are partial, one piece of ground is rained upon, and another piece, close by, is not rained upon. Thus it comes to pass that, where others drink deep draughts, you poor and needy ones come seeking water, "and there is none."

"And there is none." Of course, if you go to places where there is none of the living water, why, then, you have only yourself to blame when you cannot find it. If you go where the modern divinity is taught, if you go where you hear the new doctrines, you will find no water of life there. "There is none." That stream has been dried up long ago; the Sirocco of doubt has swept across it, and it has vanished, and there is nothing left but the dry bed of the river. People who go constantly to hear that kind of teaching must not blame the Lord, or complain, if they seek water and find none. When a bucket has the bottom out, and the well has long since ceased to hold any water, if you go there again for it, you will simply find that "there is none." But the pain of it is that, sometimes, the earnest child of God frequents a ministry which God has formerly blessed to him, and has also blessed to others, yet he turns away sorrowfully from the well which has yielded him no water, and he says, "there is none." God is showing him the emptiness of the creature, the vanity of all mortal help. He has a great and a wise design in it all, and it may be that he will keep his child in that condition for a long time, as poor and needy, seeking water, and finding none.

IV. Fourthly, we have here THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER: "and their tongue faileth for thirst."

They cannot speak; *they cannot tell their fellow-Christians about their trouble:* "their tongue faileth for thirst." They are ashamed to tell others what they feel. It is a sad state for any to be in, yet many are in it, and knowing that they are guilty, and that it is their own fault that they have fallen so low, they cannot tell their fellow-Christians anything about their condition, and so they miss one very useful means of comfort. And their tongue so faileth for thirst that now, if a hymn is given out, they feel as if they must not sing it. If there is a promise quoted, they feel as if they could not appropriate it; and sometimes the prayer of a joyous brother seems to shoot over their head, they cannot attain to his experience. Ay, "their tongue faileth for thirst." They do not know how to express what they feel.

If they were called upon *to state their own feelings and convictions before the living God*, it may be that they have become so mournful and sad that they could not describe themselves. Indeed, this is one of the painful parts of some men's condition, that it is

indescribable. If they could only put it down in black and white, they might hope to get over it; but it is mysterious, singular, strange, unaccountable. They have fallen into such a queer condition, they have got down so low, that "their tongue faileth for thirst."

Now I think we have gone about as low as we can. Here is a man who, to begin with, is poor and needy. Here is a man who is wanting water, who has sought it, but who cannot find it. Here is a man whose tongue is so parched with thirst that he cannot now say a single word, he must sit down in sorrowful silence.

V. Yet, strange to say, now is the time that he learns that SALVATION IS OF GOD.

Look again at the text; it says, "I the Lord will hear them." What? Why, they cannot speak: "their tongue faileth for thirst." Yet it says here, "I the Lord will hear them." Well, but their tongue faileth them. Ay, but he says it, "I the Lord will hear them." So that brings me to this point, that God's great object, in bringing his people down so low as this, is *to make them pray directly to himself;*—that now they may not seek any water, but just cry to him who is the fountain of living waters,—that now they may not tell their friends about their need, nor even tell it to themselves; but just, in the very silence of their soul, speak with God, for there is a kind of speech which is perfectly consistent with silence,—the speech of sorrow,—the exhibition of the wounds of misery,—the opening up of the brokenness of the heart,—the setting before God, not in eloquent descriptions, but in indescribable revelation, the intolerable want which lies within the soul. God means you, dear friend, to turn right to him. The text does not even say that they pray; because, sometimes, even prayer becomes a mechanical act, and we are apt to rely upon it for comfort, instead of upon our God. So the Lord says that he will hear them, though there is no mention of prayer, and they feel that they cannot pray. You feel, perhaps, as if you could not pray; well, then, now turn yourself to God, rest yourself on God. You feel that all is over with you, that your case is desperate; then, roll yourself upon the living God. This is the point to which he means to bring you; so do not let even your desire to pray be an obstacle between the Lord and your soul. If you cannot utter a word, pray in this sense,—that your very heart, with unutterable groanings, pours itself out like water before the living God. This is where he would have us come; and, oftentimes, it needs all this bursting of the tempest, all this sorrow, all this grief, before the Lord can get us really to speak with him, not in words, but from our very soul.

The prayer which is hidden away in the text—for, although there is no mention of prayer in it, yet it is hidden away there,—is *the prayer of inward thirst.* You know that it is useless to say to a man who is in distress of soul, "You must groan every morning, and you must groan every night." No, no; he groans when he cannot help it; and though I wish that all would have their special seasons for prayer, yet I do believe that the most mighty prayer in the world is that which cannot be timed, or regulated, but which comes

out because the suppliant must pray. "Oh, God!" There may be more real prayer in that ejaculation, when it is forced out of you by the overwhelming sense of your need, than there is when you put yourself into a comfortable position, and kneel down to pray; for, sometimes, you may get up from that posture and say to yourself, "There, I think I prayed very well;" yet, all the while, there may not have been any true prayer in it. But when, at another time, you say, "O Lord, I cannot pray; I feel as if I could not pray;"—why, dear man, you are praying! You are praying with all your might. There is more prayer, oftentimes, in that sense of not being able to pray than there is in the Pharisaic thought of having discharged the holy duty acceptably; for, in the one case, it is the soul speaking by the Holy Spirit; and, in the other case, it may be nothing more than the lips speaking into the air.

This is *the prayer of one who despairs of all means.* I wish I could drive every sinner into that corner, so that he would understand that, as no Popish priest can save him, and as no good works can save him, so no sermon-hearing can save him, no Bible-reading can save him, no praying can save him, nothing that he can do can save him; but he must get to God, and cast himself upon Christ, or else he will be lost. To many of you I might say, "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but ye will not come to Christ that ye might have life;" for that is where the true life lies, in Christ, not in the Scriptures, blessed as they are. I hope that no one will mistake my meaning, for I am only putting the Scriptures as the Lord Jesus Christ put them when he was speaking to the Jews; but I desire to put the actual coming to Christ higher than anything else that is possible to you. Get away from all means, and just feel, "Now they are all gone, and I will go to God, and say, 'O God, if thou dost not help me, whence shall I be helped? Neither the barn-floor nor the winepress can help me now; there is a famine in Samaria; I am fain to eat up even the fruit of my own soul, yet it cannot satisfy me; I must go to thee, my Father, for all around me I see husks which swine may eat, but I cannot. I must have thee.'"

Notice, also, dear friends, that this is *the prayer of faintness:* "their tongue faileth for thirst." Oh, what blessed prayer comes out of a heart that faints away on the bosom of Christ! What powerful pleading there is in that very act! It is abject weakness making the most mighty appeal it can to almighty love. "There, Lord, there is nothing more that I can do. There is no hope for me, in heaven or on earth, apart from thee. Now, if I perish, I perish; but wilt thou—canst thou—let me die?" No, he cannot and he will not let us die, for now comes the step upwards. You have taken one already in that silent heart-prayer.

Now comes *the declaration of God:* "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Is it not something that God hears you? I think that I have frequently had to explain this word by speaking of the poor woman who was so pleased to see her minister. She was very poor, and so was her minister; what good, then, did he do her? Did he speak to her a very comforting word?

No. The good man did not happen, that day, to be in much of a mood to do so, yet he did that sister a deal of good, she said. Why? Because he let her talk, and she just told out all her trouble, and he looked sympathetic, for that is how he felt, and that was just what she wanted. She wanted somebody who would listen to her. It is wonderfully condescending on God's part to listen to us. Many of our complaints are only rubbish, yet he hears them patiently. Sometimes, when people begin groaning and grumbling, I wish I was down the next street; but God is so patient, and long-suffering, that he hears all that his people say. Oh, what things you and I have had to tell him! We did not like to tell anybody else, but we have felt that we must reveal it to him; and we have done so very faintly and feebly, yet there he has been listening to us: "I the Lord will hear them."

You know, dear friends, that *you have only to get a hearing from God*, and you know what the consequence will be when your Heavenly Father knoweth what things you have need of. He only needs to know, and he will surely supply all that you lack. So when you have got a hearing from God, you have got everything. There it is in our text: "I the Lord will hear them." We say that God is "a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God." That is quite true, but it is not a Biblical expression. David said, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." It is enough for him to hear it. If he hears it, he will be quite certain to be moved with compassion, and to come to the help of his child. It is all well with you, my brother, it is all well with you, my sister, though you cannot pray to God in words. Only exhibit your wounds, let their poor dumb mouths plead for you. They have pleaded; God has heard them; he will answer you. You shall yet come up out of the dungeon, and from this time forth he will fulfil the promise, "I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

You know what work God had with Jacob that night when the angel wrestled with him. The trouble with Jacob was that he was so terribly strong, and the chief work that had to be done upon him was to make him weak. The angel wrestled with him, and he wrestled with the angel. He was a strong fellow, yet he never prevailed by his strength; and he would not have prevailed had not the angel touched him, so that his sinew shrank, and down he went; then, as he fell, he still clung to the angel and said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." That fall of his won the day; it was the lame Jacob who took the prey. It is the God of Israel, also, who will bless you, but he must first touch you, and make the sinew shrink. You must be nothing and nobody before God will help you. I have observed that, whenever God has given success to my own preaching, I have had a time of sore soul-trouble either before it or afterwards. I have noticed that some brethren, who have suddenly come to the front, and have apparently been very useful, have generally become top-heavy if the press has not abused them, or if they have not had some trying affliction, and you hear the sad news concerning them that they have gone astray. But when God ballasts the ship well,—when he takes down the topsails.

—when he makes the vessel have a trial trip in stormy weather, then he is often pleased to put many of his saints on board such a ship as that. So, brother, be thankful if you are a tried man, and believe that God is going to bless you. Be thankful, brethren, if you have had an experience of this horrible thirst,—if your tongue has been made to cleave to the roof of your mouth in anguish of ungratified desire after God. If you have been ground to pieces, like fine flour in the mill, now may you be offered unto God. If you have been slain, now may you be a sacrifice unto the Most High. But there must be the sentence of death in yourselves; there must be a breaking, and a grinding, and a tearing, or else it is not likely that there will be the sweet shining of Jehovah's face, and perpetual joy and peace.

I have been all this while trying to fish; I wonder whether, by God's grace, I have caught the one for whom my hook was baited. Is there anybody here who has not any good thing in himself at all? Is there any poor wretch, who feels that he is only fit to be swept up by the devil with a broom, and to be cast into the fire? Is that how you feel,—as if you were the offscouring of all things, and in your own esteem not worthy for God to tread on,—such a thing as never should have been in existence; and, being here, ought to be put out of existence as soon as possible? O thou nothing, Christ is willing to be thine All-in-all! O thou naked one, here is a garment to cover thee! O thou hungry one, here is food for thee! My Lord seeks after you who are downtrodden, you who lie on the dunghill, forked out, and ready to be spread on the field as if you were only so much manure. Still he calls you; come, and trust him.• You have nothing else to trust to; you have no other refuge, so fly to Christ. Fall down before your God, fall flat on your face, man, and then, when the great shell bursts, which you are now dreading, not a fragment of it shall strike you. Your safety lies in casting yourself upon the mercy and grace of God. Say, "It must be mercy, great mercy, nothing but mercy, that can meet my case. I am a lost, ruined, undone sinner; but I believe in the great love, grace, and mercy of God in the person of his dear Son; and now down I fall, trusting in Jesus crucified." You are a saved man if there lives one. Trust thou thus in Jesus, and thou hast, in that very act, passed from death unto life. Therefore, go thy way in peace. The Lord, that killed thee, hath made thee alive. The Lord, that wounded thee, hath healed thee. May his blessing abide upon every one of you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ZECHARIAH XII. 10—14; AND XIII. 1, 2.

Chapter xii. Verse 10. *And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications:*

This is a promise concerning Israel. Long have the Jews rejected the Christ, but the day is coming when they shall acknowledge Jesus of

Nazareth to be the promised Messiah. In that day, this promise will be fulfilled. God must always give "the spirit of grace" ere men will pray aright; and wherever grace is given, there is always true prayer.

10. *And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*

Discovering that they have rejected the true Messiah, they will be overcome with the most acute grief that was ever endured, grief altogether inconceivable.

11. *In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.*

One of the greatest mournings that was ever known was that when Josiah was slain in battle, and the people lamented that their best of kings was so early taken away from them. Such shall be the sorrow that shall fall upon repenting Israel.

12. *And the land shall mourn, every family apart;*

There shall be universal mourning throughout the whole land; yet it shall be special and particular to each household: "every family apart."

12—14. *The family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.*

True repentance is the distinct act of each individual. It cannot as a rule be performed in the mass. There is a general repentance which, like that of the Ninevites, has a special excellence about it, because it affects a whole city or nation; but that is not the kind of repentance which is described here. In this case, the sharpness of personal conviction of sin cuts and wounds the conscience of each individual, and there is a bitter cry uttered by each one as if he were the only sinner in the world. Oh, how sincerely you and I would repent if we felt as if we were the only ones who had ever broken God's law; yet such a repentance as that we must feel if we would be personally forgiven.

Chapter xiii. Verse 1. *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.*

They shall see their pardon when they have truly seen their sin. When once the foulness of their transgression is perceived, then the fountain of cleansing shall be perceived, too. No man ever knows the preciousness of the God-given remedy till he has felt the force of the terrible disease. No one by faith plunges into the crystal fount of perfect cleansing without first lamenting the filthiness which needs to be removed.

2. *And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.*

Where there is pardon, there is sure to be sanctification. The idols must fall, and the false prophets must go. We cannot have our sins and have a Saviour too. If we have Christ to blot out our sin, we must have the same Christ to remove sin as to its authority, and power, and dominion over us.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—230, 544, 379.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ANGELIC INTEREST IN THE GOSPEL.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 21ST, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, September 25th, 1881.

"Which things the angels desire to look into."—1 Peter i. 12.

THE apostle Peter wrote his first Epistle to a persecuted people, many of whom were in great heaviness through manifold trials. The sufferings of the early Christians are something terrible even to think upon; the world has scarcely ever beheld more relentless cruelty than that which pursued the first servants of our Divine Lord and Master. Peter, therefore, when he wrote to these tried saints, sought to cheer and encourage them. What, then, did he write about? Why, about the gospel; for there is nothing like the simple doctrine of salvation by redemption to comfort the most distressed spirits.

The chapter from which our text is taken is just as plain as the gospel itself is. Peter here tells the elect strangers that they were "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" and he also reminds them that they "were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold;" "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." In this chapter we have all the great central truths of the gospel,—election, redemption, regeneration, effectual calling, sanctification, and final perseverance. Brothers and sisters, whenever we want consolation, let us never go away from the gospel to find it. The child of God always finds his best comfort in the things of God. If your comforts can only come to you from worldly society, it is quite clear that you belong to the world; but if you are one of God's true children, all that you want to cheer you under the heaviest trial is already provided for you in the gospel of Christ, and will speedily be applied to you by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, if you only seek it at his hands. Peter here prescribes a remedy for lowness of spirits and for general depression. That remedy is, to take a deeper interest in the things

of God, to give ourselves more intensely to the consideration and contemplation of them. They are well worthy of all the thought that we can give to them; for if the prophets, those men with the grandest of human minds, divinely inspired, yet had to search deeply to understand God's Word as revealed to them, there must be something in it that we shall do well to search out; and if the holy angels, those mighty intelligences, do not so much see, as "desire to look into," the things of God, there must be some very deep things hidden within the simplicities of the gospel which you and I ought to search out. If we did search them out, we should be greatly cheered and comforted. Our minds would be taken off those trials which now so often vex us; we should be lifted high above them, we should not travel slowly and painfully over this rough road, and have our feet cut with every sharp flint, and our spirit pierced with every sore trial; but we should rise, as on eagle's wings, and ride on the high places of the earth, and rejoice in the Saviour who has done such great things for us. We should eat the fat things full of marrow which God has provided for those who diligently study his Word, and prize it above all earthly treasures.

I am not going to say anything at this time about the high interest which the ancient prophets took in God's Word; but I shall confine myself very much to the interest which angels take in it, in order that I may stir you up to imitate their example. I want, first, to remind you that *angels take an active interest in the gospel of our salvation;* and, secondly, to show you that *angels are eager students of it:* "which things the angels desire to look into."

I. First, I want to remind you that ANGELS TAKE AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN THE GOSPEL OF OUR SALVATION.

It is true that *they are not interested in it for themselves.* They have never sinned; and, consequently, they need no atonement, and no forgiveness. Doubtless, they have some sort of indirect interest in it, which I will not attempt to explain just now; but, certainly, as far as the gospel brings salvation, healing, pardon, justification, cleansing, angels do not need it. Never having been defiled, they need not to be washed; and being perfect in their obedience, they need not to be forgiven for any shortcomings. And yet they take a deep interest in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; what, then, shall I say of the madness of those who are defiled by sin, and yet have no interest in the fountain where they can be washed whiter than snow? What shall I say of the fatal folly of those who are guilty, and yet take no thought about the method of pardon which God has provided in Christ Jesus his Son, and our only Saviour?

The angels are not even interested in the gospel *because of its relation to any of their fellows,* for fallen angels have no part nor lot in its provisions. When they fell from their first estate, God left them without hope for ever; and they abide in their rebellion against him, waiting for the awful day when they shall receive the full recompense of their infamous revolt. There is no mercy for fallen spirits. See how God exercises his sovereignty; when men and angels had both sinned, he passed by the greater sinners, and

took up the lesser ones. The fallen spirits "he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Yet he looked on men, the creatures of a day, with eyes of pity and compassion, and sent his Son to earth, in our nature, that he might redeem us from the wrath which was justly our due. The angels have no direct interest in the death of Christ, and the blood of Christ, because of any blessing which will come through him to any of their former angelic companions; yet they desire to look into these things. What, then, shall I think of myself, and of you, my brother, if, being saved ourselves, we take little or no interest in the gospel as the one means of saving our fellow-men? Shame upon us if we have less pity for mankind than angels have, for men are our brothers, and nothing can save them but the gospel of Jesus; and, therefore, our common humanity ought to make us seek their welfare, and we ought to take the deepest imaginable interest in the things which make for the peace of their immortal souls.

Angels take a deep interest in the gospel *because they observe God's interest in it.* That for which God cares, angels care for at once. That which grieves the Holy Spirit, must be grievous to holy angels, too; and that which gladdens the heart of God must also make glad the spirits that bow adoringly around his throne. The holy ones cry, each one to his fellow, "God is glorified in saving sinful men. Our blessed Lord and Leader went down to earth to accomplish the redemption of the fallen; therefore, let us learn all we can concerning his wondrous work; and wherever there is anything that we can do to help it on, let us stand, with outspread wings, eager to fly at the command of God."

Doubtless, the angels also take an interest in the gospel, *because they are full of love.* Those pure spirits love as surely as they live; and not only do they love their God, and love one another, but they also love us who were made a little lower than the angels. They have a great affection for us,—very much more, I imagine, than we have for them. We are their younger brothers, as it were, and we are, by reason of our flesh and blood, linked to materialism, while they are pure spirits; yet they do not envy us the love of God, neither do they despise us on account of our faults and follies; though, methinks, they must often wonder at us. They must sometimes be ready to ask questions concerning our strange behaviour, just as two of them did when Christ had risen from the dead, and Mary Magdalene was weeping. Those angels were full of joy because Christ had risen, so they said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" What could there be to weep about when Jesus had risen from the dead? Ah, beloved! the angels must often be astonished at us, and think we are the strangest creatures that well can be; yet they love us, and therefore they take a great interest in that gospel which promotes our highest good. They know what we too frequently forget, that nothing can make us so happy as for us to be holy, and that nothing can make us holy but being washed in the blood of Jesus, and being renewed by the Holy Spirit. Out of their homage to God, and their brotherhood to man, comes that interest

which makes them desire to look into the deep things of God and his gospel.

The angels have always taken an interest in all that concerns men. Some of them stood at the gate of Eden, with a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep our first father out, should he attempt to force his way back when he had lost his right to all its joy, even as the most loving spirit in the world is still upon the side of justice, and believes that God is righteous, even though paradise be lost, and man be doomed to eat bread in the sweat of his face. We are on man's side, but much more on God's; and we say, "Let God, the ever Just One, be glorified, whatever becomes of the sons of men."

After that fatal day of the Fall, the angels constantly watched over men here below, and frequently spake with one and another of them as God sent them with messages of mercy to Abraham, or to Isaac, or to Lot, or to Jacob, or to others of the human race. But there was a great day when, in solemn pomp, the chariots of God, which are "twenty thousand, even thousands of angels," came down to Mount Sinai, when the law was proclaimed. The angels were there as the courtiers of the great King, to give additional solemnity to the declaration of the law of God. That they should have been present on that august occasion, shows their interest in the sons of men.

But I like better to speak to you of their coming to announce the birth of him of whom we sing, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." When that birth, which they had announced, took place, how gladly did they come and hover over Bethlehem's fields, and sing the grand chorale, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." It was their intense interest in us that made them glad that our Redeemer was born. Then, as we sang at the commencement of this service,—

> "In all his toils and dangerous paths
> They did his steps attend,
> Oft paused, and wonder'd how at last
> The scene of love would end."

At that notable time when he was tempted in the wilderness, and was with the wild beasts, when the devil had left him, angels came and ministered unto him. They were ever near him while he was here, always invisibly attendant upon his footsteps. You remember how there appeared unto him an angel strengthening him when he was in his agony in the garden of Gethsemane; it was a wondrous thing that the Son of God should have strength infused into him by an angelic messenger. With what awestruck interest the angels must have watched our Lord upon the cross!

> "As on the tottering tree he hung,
> And darkness veil'd the sky,
> They saw, aghast, that awful sight,
> The Lord of Glory die!"

But glad were they to descend to his empty sepulchre, and to enter it, and guard the place where for a while the sacred casket of his body

had lain. They spake to his disciples, and comforted them by telling them that he had risen from the dead; and, all along, they took such interest in everything relating to him because they recognized in him the Saviour of sinful men.

> "They brought his chariot from above,
> To bear him to his throne;
> Clapp'd their triumphant wings, and cried,
> 'The glorious work is done.'"

Nor is this all. We know, from Scripture, that they not only watched over the Saviour, but *they rejoice over penitents.* The Lord Jesus has told us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" that is to say, there is joy in God's heart, and the angels can see it. They stand in God's presence, and they can see that God is glad; and we know that they also share that gladness. In the parable of the lost sheep, our Saviour represents the shepherd calling together his friends and his neighbours, and saying to them, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." So they do, I am sure; they rejoice over every rescued one that is brought home upon the shoulders of the good Shepherd.

And, beloved, *they watch over every believing soul.* This is one of their chief offices, for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" That promise which Satan misquoted is true to every child of God: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." From what spiritual evils they guard us, it is not for me to attempt to tell; nor to try to describe how, often, in mid-air, there are fierce fights between the demons from hell and the good spirits from heaven; or how the prince of the power of the air is baffled and driven back by Michael the archangel as he comes to take care of the living body of Christ, as once of old he guarded the dead body of Moses. Ah! we little know how much we owe to these invisible agents of the ever-blessed God. They are deeply interested in all his children. The parable tells us that Lazarus died, "and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." What that expression means, I shall not attempt to explain; but I am quite sure that when we who love the Lord die, angels will have something to do with our departure, and with our introduction into the world of happy spirits, and into the presence-chamber of the Lord our God. I like Bunyan's account of the pilgrims passing through the river, and the shining ones meeting them on the other side, and leading them up the steep ascent into the Celestial City where they see their Master's face with joy, and go no more out for ever.

Nor will they have done with us even then; for when we shall be with God eternally shut in, and safe from all danger of falling and sinning, the angels will swell the music of our continual song, for they shall sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Yet we shall be able to sing what they cannot,

"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

Further, these dear attendants of our wandering footsteps here below, these patient guardians of our nightly hours, these angel guides, who shall be our companions in death when wife and child and friend can go no farther with us, *these glorious beings shall learn from our lips in heaven the manifold wisdom of God.* They will cluster around us amazed and gladdened as, one by one, we stand upon the sea of glass; and they will ask us to rehearse again and again the wonders of redeeming love, and to tell them what conversion meant, and what sanctification meant, and how the power and wisdom and grace and patience of God were seen in the experience of each one of us; and we shall be their joyful teachers, world without end.

Have I not proved to you that angels take an active interest in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? And may I not come back to this practical point,—do you also take an active interest in the gospel,—you in whose nature Christ appeared,—you sons of men,—you who must be for ever lost unless the precious blood of the bleeding Lamb be sprinkled upon you?

> "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,
> Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"

It was for such as you that he died, even for the guilty sons and daughters of men, "for verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." He took up men, not angels; shall they, then, be interested in the gospel, and shall not you, whom it specially concerns, also be interested in it? I have already reminded you that they have no brother-angels to be converted by the gospel; they have no sister-angels to be turned to God by the story of Calvary; yet they are deeply interested in the gospel and also in us; and will not you, my fellow-Christians, take a deeper interest in the work of God, and in the propagation of the gospel, when your own flesh and blood must be converted by it, or else must die eternally? Our sisters and brothers, our sons and daughters, our wives and husbands, possibly even our parents, will perish for ever unless Jesus Christ is brought to them, and they are brought to him. What are you at, you careless professors, you who can go calmly to sleep while men and women are being damned? What are you thinking of, you who eat the fat, and drink the sweet in the courts of the Lord's house, and yet never show to the prisoners the way to liberty, nor tell to the dying the good news that "there is life for a look at the Crucified One," nor say to the perishing that there is salvation even for them in Christ Jesus your Lord? Up, up! I charge you, by every swift-winged angel who takes an interest in the cross of Christ, and in the salvation of men, arouse ye, sons of men; if ye may, anyhow, be the means of saving some, be active in the service of that Saviour who gave his all for you. God bless that exhortation to all whom it concerns!

II. Now we turn to the second point, which is this,—that ANGELS ARE EAGER STUDENTS OF THE GOSPEL, and of all the truths connected with it: "Which things the angels desire to look into."

It is quite certain, then, that *angels do not know all that is in the gospel*, for they desire to look into it. All the gospel is not known to them, and I do not think that it is all known to any of us. I have occasionally met with certain brethren, who have professed to have the whole of the gospel condensed into five points of doctrine, so that they could put it all into their waistcoat pocket, and carry it there; and they seemed to think that they had not anything more to learn. If one tried to teach them any other truth beside what they already knew, they were angry, for they did not want to know any more. They are not like the holy angels, for they desire to look into these things. Dr. John Owen was, perhaps, the most profound divine who ever lived; yet Dr. John Owen could not know, on earth, as much about certain things as angels did; and I should say that, this very day, he desires still to look into the mystery of redeeming love and the glory of Christ of which he wrote with such wonderful power. The apostle Paul had been converted many years when he wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, yet in it he expressed the longing of his heart that he might know Christ. But did he not know him? And if he did not, who did? No doubt, he felt that there was so much of Christ that he had not known that what he did know amounted to very little. I have heard the word perfection used very glibly by some who seemed to me to know little of its meaning; but will any sane man claim that he has attained to perfection in knowledge? To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." The mystery of redemption was hidden in Christ from eternity, and it was only made known to the Church or even to the angels gradually. They do not yet know everything. Concerning his second coming, our Lord said to his disciples, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

The devil also does not know everything. I am sure that Satan did not know that Christ came into the world to redeem men by dying for them, or else he would never have stirred them up to put him to death. He would have been far too cunning for that; he would have tried, if possible, to keep Christ alive so that we might not have been redeemed by him. The devil does not know as much as he thinks he knows, even now; and, often, he is outwitted by a simple-hearted child of God, who knows how to believe in God, and is brave enough to do the right. Neither men, nor prophets, nor angels, nor devils, know all about the gospel yet. They need still to go on studying, and meditating, and contemplating, as the holy beings before the throne of God are doing: "which things the angels desire to look into."

But, brethren, though they do not yet know all about Christ and his gospel, *they want to know all they can.* They have many other subjects to study. There are all the worlds that God has made, and possibly they have liberty to range over them all; yet I do not read

with reference to the marvels of astronomy, "which things the angels desire to look into." Angels doubtless know much more than all our scientific men do concerning the former ages of this world; they could tell much about the various formations and strata of which geologists talk, yet I do not find it recorded that the angels have any particular desire to look into those things. When God created the world, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." They have oftentimes admired the providential arrangements of God, and praised the wise Ruler who guideth all things with infinite wisdom. But now their chief contemplations seem to be fixed on Christ and his gospel.

Just notice two or three passages of Scripture. Turn first to Exodus xxv. 20, where we read concerning the cherubim, who belong to one order of angels: "The cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be;"—"toward the mercy seat," as if their eyes were continually fixed upon the redemption of Christ, the propitiation wrought out by his sacrifice. In Daniel's day, these blessed spirits took the greatest conceivable interest in knowing all they could about our redemption. If you turn to the 8th chapter of the Book of Daniel, and the 13th verse, you can read what that man of God wrote: "Then I heard one saint"—"one holy one"—"speaking, and another holy one said unto that certain holy one which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation?" "How long?"—that was the question which the holy ones asked long before Christ descended to earth. Read also in the 12th chapter, at the 5th verse: "Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" They asked again and again, "How long?" All their thoughts were concentrated upon the things of God, and they desired to look into them.

Now I want you to remember, in order that it may humble us, that *angels have very keen intellects.* I believe that they far excel us in their powers of thought; and yet, though they have learned so much about the gospel, they do not pretend to have come any further than this, they desire to look into it. You and I, perhaps, suppose that we know all about the gospel; and that we do not need to have hours of study, and thought, and prayer, and the unction of the Holy Spirit. Poor miserable fools! Angels, who are vastly superior to us in intelligence, have gone no further than to have the desire to learn and to know; I am afraid that many of you have not got as far as that. It is a grand thing to desire to look into these things; it proves that we already know something of their worth when we desire to know more.

Recollect, also, that *the intellects of angels have never been warped by prejudice.* There is not a man amongst us who is not prejudiced to some extent. Our parents warped us in one direction, and our

companions have warped us another way, and we have all of us the propensity to take a one-sided view of things, even though we may be perfectly ignorant of the bias; and, sometimes, this prejudice of ours prevents us from seeing clearly; but it is not so with the angels. There is no beam, nor even a mote, in their eye; their knowledge is not infinite, but it is wonderful knowledge as far as it goes; yet even they see not all that there is in the gospel, for, of it, as of the love of God, it can truly be said,—

> "The firstborn sons of light
> Desire in vain its depths to see;
> They cannot reach the mystery,
> The length, and breadth, and height."

Then, again, *the angels have been long looking into these things.* I know not what the age of the angels may be; we know nothing of any creation of angels since the creation of the world. In the long ages ere man trod this earth, angels had begun to think of looking into the wonders of God's grace; yet, after thousands of years, they do not fully comprehend the mysteries of redeeming love. Ah, my brothers and sisters, the gospel is a boundless thing, even as your ruin was infinite and horrible beyond conception; and woe to the man who tries to make out that there is but a little hell, and a little God, and but little wrath of God! As surely as your overthrow was inconceivably terrible, so the designs of God for your redemption, and your exaltation in Christ, are inconceivably magnificent. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Some of us have very large expectations of what God means to make even of his creatures who are now cooped up in flesh and blood; but our highest anticipations will probably be far exceeded by the glorious reality. Even angels do not yet fully know, after all their study, what the mighty love of God has done and will yet do for us.

Do not forget, too, dear friends, that *angels are not subject to such infirmities as we are.* I know that I have forgotten a great deal more than I know, and I suppose that most of you have done the same; and when we have learnt a thing, we are often like people who take up a handful of water; it is soon all gone. What leaky sieves our memories are! Angels, however, have no such failure of mind. They have never sinned; and, therefore, from much of our infirmity, they must be altogether free. Yet, though far superior to us in this respect, this is the position they have reached, they stand over the mercy seat, with wings outstretched, and with their eyes continually fixed upon that token of the propitiation, desiring to look into it. That is where you and I also stand; if we are truly humble, we feel that this is as far as we have come as yet.

Now, let us enquire,—*What are the things which the angels desire to look into?* I can only refer very briefly to them.

They are, first, the incarnation, life, and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; the way in which God could be just, and yet justify the ungodly; that sacred art by which the suffering of the Law-giver made a sufficient recompense to the offended law; the wondrous power of those sufferings Godward and manward; how

these sufferings have broken men's hearts, and separated them from their sins; how they have given them joy and peace, and united them for ever to their God. You and I have only seen the sparkle on the surface of the crimson sea of redemption; we cannot understand the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ our Lord; so let us still desire to look into it, as the angels do.

Next, they desire to know something concerning the resurrection of Christ. "How do you know that?" you ask. Why, the verse before the one containing our text speaks of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." So angels love to think of Christ as risen from the dead, of Christ ascended, and of Christ yet to come in his glory. They desire to gaze into that mystery, and to learn how the glorious God can become yet more glorious by taking upon himself our nature, and so magnifying his grace above all his name, by redeeming fallen men, and by lifting them up into communion with God.

Angels desire to look into all the mystery of human hearts,—how they are fallen, how they are regenerated, how they are preserved, how they are sanctified, how they are strengthened, how they are taught, how they are perfected. There is a wonderful field for their inspection there, in the work of the Holy Ghost upon the sons and daughters of Adam, by virtue of the death of Christ.

And angels want also to know what God is going to do with this poor world. It is an awful problem to us; and so it is to them, I expect. Can you make this world out? Did you ever try to understand it? It is a dreadful nut for anyone to crack,—all these millions of men continually dying without God, and without Christ, and without hope. What are to be the eternal issues of it all? How will it come out that God is glorified at the last when such multitudes perish? There are some brethren who think they know all about this mystery; they have a philosophy which explains it all. I have no such philosophy; nor do I wish to have. I sometimes found, when I was a child, that it was a pleasant thing for me to be with my father, and to hear him talk even when I did not fully understand what he was talking about; so I find it a blessed thing to get near to God, and to see what he is doing, even when I do not know what he is doing, for I am perfectly satisfied that he cannot do anything that is wrong. Still, angels and men may join in the common desire to look into the wonderful working of God's providence and grace.

But the angels also desire to look into the glory that shall follow. What is the glory that is yet to come to those spirits of just men made perfect who, as yet, have not their glorified bodies, but are waiting for them until the resurrection trumpet shall sound? What will be the glory of that moment when, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living shall be changed? And what will be the glory of that dread hour when heaven and earth shall gather before the last tribunal, and on the great white throne the Judge shall sit, and all of woman born shall be gathered before him, to give an account of the deeds done

in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil? And what glory it will be, ere that day has closed, when over all the world of sinners the waves of God's infinite wrath shall roll, and they shall sink to the bottom like a stone, never to taint the earth again! And what a glory it will be when all those on the King's right hand, all the blood-washed, all the redeemed, shall stream up to their everlasting thrones to sit for ever with their conquering Leader, and reign eternally, peers in the palace of the King, for ever adoring, for ever blessing his holy name! Oh, what glory will be there! I will not attempt to describe it, for even the angels, who are in heaven, desire to look into this mystery, for even they scarcely know what will be the glory of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."

You know that the Greeks had, every now and then, a great gathering of all the nation in what they called their general assembly. Everyone was represented there,—poet and philosopher, tragedian and military man. All the glories of Greece were there. Well, there is to come a general assembly, an ecumenical council of the entire Church of God; and when they shall all be there on the plains of heaven,—prophets, confessors, apostles, martyrs, humble men and women from every part of the world,—not one of the redeemed absent, but all there with their King in the midst of them, what a shout of victory, what hallelujahs, what songs of joy, what triumphant *jubilates*, shall welcome that glad day! By God's grace, I shall be there. My hearer, will you be there? Are you sure of it? If so, let the glad anticipation of it rejoice your heart even now; though you do not know what the full realization of it will be, for even angels, who have seen the lesser gatherings of the saints, have not yet seen the one universal assembly, the gathering of all the clans, the coronation of the Prince, the marriage of the bride, the Lamb's wife, and all the glory of God, and the splendour of the infinite meridian brilliance that will be displayed before the wondering eyes of God's elect saints and God's elect angels. They do not know what it is to be, nor do you; but we as well as they desire to look into it, and I hope we all desire to be there.

Now let me close by saying that, *as the angels are such deep students of the things of God, let us try to be the same.* I wish that I could stir up all my dear friends who are saved to try to look more closely into the things of God. I am afraid that we are going to have a greater proportion of superficial believers than we have had in the past, for we have so many people who are always hallooing about their religion. God bless them, and let them halloo as loudly as they like; but I wish that they had something more to halloo about. There are some who are always crying, "Believe, believe, believe;" but, for the life of them, they could not tell you what it is that you have to believe. And many shout, "Hallelujah!" who do not know what "Hallelujah!" means, or they would be far more reverent towards that blessed word, "Praise to Jehovah!" We want, brethren and sisters, that you who are saved should seek to know how and why you were saved. You who have a hope of salvation should know the reason for the hope that is in

you. Study the Scriptures much. In the Puritan days, there used to be a number of contemplative Christians, who shut themselves up to study the Word of the Lord, and so became masters of theology. Perhaps some were not so practical in winning souls as they ought to have been; but now we are getting to the opposite pole of the compass. We have many who are rushing about, and professing to feed the people; but what do they give them? Where is your bread, sir? "Oh, I could not let these poor people wait." But why do you not go and fill your basket? You have nothing in it. "Oh! I had not time to do that; I wanted to go and give them"—— Give them what? Give them half of the nothing that you have brought? That will do them no good at all. There is nothing like having good seed in the basket when you go out to sow; and when you go to feed the hungry, there is nothing like having good bread to give them; and that cannot be the case spiritually, unless we are diligent students of the Word, unless we search the deep things of God. By all means let us advance our forces into the recesses of the enemy's country, but let us secure our communications, and let us have a good firm basis of Scriptural knowledge, otherwise mischief will come to our scattered powers. By all means be enthusiastic, by all means be intense; but you cannot keep a fire burning without fuel, and you cannot keep up real intensity and enthusiasm without a knowledge of Christ and an understanding of the things of God, "which things the angels desire to look into."

Now, dear friends, those of you who have nothing to do with this matter, I would like you to go away thinking that, if an angel cares about these things, and if an angel studies them, it is time that you did the same. I know that you are going to take your degree at the University, good sir, and I am very glad that you are likely to secure a good position in life; but I hope that you are not so foolish as to think that you know more than the angels; and if they desire to look into these things, permit me to ask you to study your Bible as well as all the other classics, for this is the best classic after all. I know, dear sir, that you are a masterly thinker; you can make a great many hypotheses, and pull them to pieces again; but I wish, for once, that you would consider this hypothesis—that, perhaps, you are not as wise as the angels. I should not wonder if that hypothesis should prove to be true. I have often noticed that people who rail at the gospel do not know what it is. Many speak against the Bible; but if they were asked, "Did you ever read it?" they would have to answer, "No." He who studies God's Word is usually conquered by it; he falls in love with it, and feels the power of it. So, as the holy angels desire to look into it, pray look into it yourself, good sir; and, on your looking there, may God give you to see Jesus, for all who look unto him shall be saved for ever. May you be one of that blessed company, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

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THE FIRST AND THE SECOND.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 28TH, 1900.

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 9th, 1881.

"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."—Hebrews x. 9.

THE way of God with men is to go from good to better, and from better to best. In the creation, "the evening and the morning were the first day," "and the evening and the morning were the second day;" and so on to the sixth day. God often gives us darkness before he gives us light, and he gives us some measure of light in the rising sun before he gives us the full glory of noontide. And this, I suppose, is not because God needs any such rule for himself. He can give the best first if so he chooses; but I imagine that this arrangement is needful because of our infirmity. It would never do for weak eyes to have the full light of the sun pouring down upon them. Often, when men are faint, and nearly dying of hunger, they would be killed outright if strong meat were at once set before them; they must be gently fed as they are able to bear it. So God, knowing the feebleness of his creatures, and especially the feebleness of his sinful creatures, is pleased to bestow his mercies with great wisdom and prudence. Little by little, first a very little, it may be, and then rather more, and then still more, and then much more, and then most of all, until he does exceedingly abound in mercy towards us according to the riches of his grace.

It often happens that the lesser blessing is a sort of preparatory school before the greater favour. The law of Moses acted as an education for men to prepare them to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. The types and shadows of the twilight of the tabernacle and temple services helped men, by-and-by, to appreciate the substance when the True Light began to shine among the sons of men. We have need to be continually educated and trained for that which lies before us. Even heaven itself we are not fit to enter until we have learnt something of heavenly things here below. There is a first in order that there may be a second; and the first has to be taken away, when it has fulfilled its design, in order that then

we may enter upon the second. Some lower good precedes the higher; and when the lower good has educated us for the higher, then it is removed, and the greater blessing fills its place, even as it says in our text, "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." I am going to sever these two sentences from their connection, just for the time being, because they seem to me to contain a valuable general principle, which may be used for comfort and instruction in many ways.

I. I shall ask you to notice, first, THE GRAND INSTANCE of this rule given in the chapter from which our text is taken, the instance which was the occasion of the utterance of the rule. "He taketh away the first;" that is, the sacrifices and offerings of the ceremonial law;—"He taketh away the first;" that is, the blood of bulls and of goats;—"that he may establish the second," which second is Christ himself, the one effectual propitiation for sin, the great burnt-offering which the Lord accepts, and by which he is reconciled to all who trust in it.

The taking away of "the first" involved *the removal of instructive and consoling ordinances.* Let us never forget that "the first" was given for the wisest possible purposes, and was itself exceedingly useful. God forbid that we should ever find fault with the first dispensation, for it was the means of great comfort, and of much instruction, to the people of God who lived under it. Though it was, in itself, little better than a piece of glass, yet the Old Testament believers saw much through it. Those of them who had clear vision saw through it the same Christ whom we, by faith, see at this day; so that window was to them a very precious thing because of the future glory which they were able to see through it. I can understand how David enjoyed the ceremonies of the holy place in his day; and how, when he was obliged to be absent, he longed once more to stand within the tabernacles of God, and envied the very sparrows and swallows that could fly or build their nests around the courts of the Lord's house. I can realize how earnestly he desired again to stand and see the priests presenting the holy offerings before the shrine of the Most High; and I can easily comprehend that, to tell him that all these observances were to be put away, would give him some cause for disquietude. But when he understood that they were to be removed in order that a second, and a better dispensation, should be established in their place, then his disquietude would altogether cease.

Brethren, we ought this day to be far more happy than ever the Jews were when God had accepted their richest sacrifices; for what, after all, were holocausts of bullocks, what were thousands upon thousands of lambs compared with the only-begotten Son of God who has sacrificed himself on our behalf? Of what avail were all the rivers of blood that were shed, and the seas of oil that were poured out? What comfort could they bring to Jewish believers compared with that which we derive from the flowing wounds of the Christ of Calvary, and from the fact that he who suffered on the cross, that he who was dead and buried, has risen again, and gone back into the glory, and is there pleading, on our behalf, the merit

of his one finished, perfect sacrifice? Yes, beloved, let "the first" go; we need not drop a single tear over its departure, seeing that "the second", which is established in its place, is so infinitely superior to it.

Many Jewish believers tried, as long as ever they could, to keep some relic of the old dispensation. For many a year, they sought at least to teach that converts to Christianity must be circumcized; but they gradually learned that, with the coming of Christ,—or, rather, through his death, the old dispensation was all taken away. Every fragment of it is gone; and, if we are wise, we shall say, "Let it go; why should we seek to preserve it? Why should we keep that which is dead now that the ever-living One has come, and dwells among us? So, let 'the first' go, and let 'the second' be established."

I want, dear friends, to urge all of you to come to this decision very emphatically. I beseech you never to try to bring back "the first." I do not suppose you will ever literally imitate the Jews, and offer the sacrifices enjoined under the ceremonial law; but there is, in certain quarters, an attempt to bring back portions of it,—ill-formed, broken bones of that which has long since been dead. For instance, when men insist upon it that such an unscriptural ceremony as infant sprinkling is necessary to salvation, and that another man-made rite must be performed, or else grace will not come to us, if we yield to their pretensions for a single moment, we shall be putting ourselves under the bondage of a ceremonial law, which has not even the authority which the law given by Moses had. The two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, which Christ has left us, are blessed means of instruction and comfort to living men and living women, but they are not saving ordinances; and he who tries to make them so, in any measure whatever, is to that extent seeking to bring back "the first" dispensation, which God has for ever abolished. He is also endeavouring to disestablish "the second" dispensation; as far as he can, he is overthrowing it. But Christ will not share with rites and ceremonies the glory of our salvation. We are either saved by grace through faith, or else by the works and ceremonies of the law; there can be no mingling of the two, for they are diametrically opposed to each other. There must be a clean taking away of "the first" that there may be an establishing of "the second."

Then I want you, next, to take care that you do regard "the second" as being really established; that is to say, that there has been offered one great sacrifice for sin, and that Christ's sacrifice has put away sin, and has put it away once for all. This is *the establishment of the real, perfect, everlasting atonement.* Now, Christian people, you do believe this as a matter of doctrine; but have you truly appropriated all the blessedness of it? Do you know that your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake; that an atonement has been presented for you, by which you are so effectually purged from guilt that you will never need to bring any other purgation, or to look for any other atonement? Do you really regard yourself as one who will never have to offer another sacrifice for sin because

your conscience is completely purged already, and you are clean every whit? I know that some professors do not like Kent's verse, but I like it, for I quite agree with him when he says,—

> "Here's pardon full for sin that's past,
> It matters not how black its cast;
> And, O my soul, with wonder view,
> For sins to come, here's pardon, too!"

The Christ who died on Calvary's cross, will not have to die again for my new sins, or to offer a fresh atonement for any transgressions that I may yet commit. No; but, once for all, gathering up the whole mass of his people's sins into one colossal burden, he took it upon his shoulders, and flung the whole of it into the sepulchre wherein once he slept, and there it is buried, never to be raised again to bear witness against the redeemed any more for ever. Do regard Christ's sacrifice, then, as firmly established, and, having been once offered, never to be repeated, that one offering having completed the redemption of all the blood-bought throng, and so finishing the great work that nothing needs to be added to it.

II. Now, secondly, I want to give you SOME HISTORICAL INSTANCES in which the same rule has been carried out. I must speak very briefly upon each point, so try to catch the words as they fly.

First, *God took away the earthly paradise, but he has given us Christ and heaven.* God gave to man, originally, perfect happiness. In the garden of Eden, there were all manner of delights; and under the covenant made with our first father, all of these would have been ours if he had persevered in obedience. But Adam sinned, and so the covenant of works was broken. He fell, and we fell in him; and, therefore, paradise was taken away from him, and from us also. There is no hope of our ever going through the gate of that garden. Even if it had remained perfect, and we could find it, we should see there the cherubim with a flaming sword turning every way to keep us out of the garden. Why hast thou taken away this paradise, Lord? The apostle here gives us the answer to our question, "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second;" for, now, as many as believe in Jesus are brought into another and a better Paradise. They are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and there is prepared for them a place of joy and delight compared with which the bliss of Eden shall not even be mentioned, neither shall that earthly paradise be brought to mind, or be spoken of any more.

Next, *the first man has failed; but behold the second Man, the Lord from heaven;* and see again the meaning of our text: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." There was a man in that first paradise; he was the first man, Adam; and you and I were representatively in him; for he was the federal head of the human race. But he fell, and he was taken away. Do we regret this, and mourn over it as though it were an irreparable calamity? By no means; for the Lord hath taken away the first man, Adam, that he may establish the second Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning these two, the apostle Paul wrote to the

Corinthians, "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second Man is the Lord from heaven." The first man has ruined us; but we have the second Man now, who heads up his people, having become their federal Representative; and in him they are saved beyond all fear of falling.

"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second," is illustrated again in the case of *Adam and Noah.* Adam was not only the federal head of the human race, but he was also its first father and founder; but, although God took away our first father, he gave the race a second father, even Noah, from whom we have all sprung as much as from the loins of Adam. Now, Adam's safety depended upon the perfection of a creature, the obedience of a human being; but Noah's safety lay in a figurative death, burial, and resurrection. He went into the ark, and died to that old world in which he had lived so long. Inside that ark, as in a coffin, he was buried beneath the descending floods; and he was floated into a new world, to be the father of a race that should live through his death, burial, and resurrection; as the apostle Peter says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us;"—not that baptism saves us, but it is another figure of how we are saved by death, burial, and resurrection, as Peter goes on to say, "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God." "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." Father Adam was taken away, but Father Noah was given to be the new head of the race, and to him the Lord said, "This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." That second covenant, which God made with Noah, is infinitely more secure than the first covenant which was broken by Adam.

Brethren, there is another great historical instance of the rule mentioned in our text in the case of *the covenants made with the literal and the spiritual Israel.* There was a first covenant to which the Israelites gave their consent soon after they came out of Egypt. That was a covenant of works, and when Moses rehearsed in the ears of the people the terms of that covenant, "All the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Yet they soon forgot their solemn promise. You remember how the commandments were "written with the finger of God" upon "two tables of testimony, tables of stone;" but when the people turned aside to worship the golden calf which Aaron had made, we read concerning Moses, "it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." In God's great longsuffering, the commandments were given a second time, though Moses, and not God, wrote on the second tables of stone, and they were put away for safety into the golden ark, above which was placed the

mercy seat of pure gold. This was another symbolical illustration of our text: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." The law in the hand of Moses is broken that we may have the law in the heart of Christ hidden away under the sacred covering of divine mercy in the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. The first covenant of "This do, and thou shalt live," is taken away, that God may establish the second, which is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The first covenant, because it waxed old, has passed away; and now God has established a second covenant, the covenant of grace: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Thus I might keep on showing you how, all the way along in history, there has been a first, and then there has been a second, as there was in the case of the temple at Jerusalem. Solomon built the first temple, but God permitted that to be taken away that he might establish that second temple into which Christ came, and so made the glory of the latter house to be greater than that of the former one. All history seems to me to say, "This is God's usual method of procedure, to give the dim twilight first, and then to follow it with the full glory of the noontide brightness." We must, therefore, expect that it will be so in our time.

III. But, now, leaving history in general, I come to your own individual history, so as to give you SOME INSTANCES IN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE of the working of this rule: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

First, this is true of *our own righteousness and Christ's.* I shall speak of myself because, then, I shall be speaking of many of you also. I once thought that I had a very fine righteousness of my own; and, in looking back upon it, I am not at all sure whether it was not about as respectable as the righteousness which the most of my friends have possessed. Like the young man who came to our Lord, I could have said, concerning the ten commandments, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" But I well recollect the time when God's Holy Spirit began to pull my righteousness away from me. Oh, how fiercely I fought to keep it! There was a terrible tugging between my pride and my conscience, for even my conscience joined with the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, in telling me that, though outwardly righteous, yet I was inwardly wicked. Still, for a long while, I could not understand and believe that I, the child of godly parents, who had never fallen asleep from the days of infancy without the repetition of the prayer my mother taught me, and who had never left my bedroom in the morning without having presented the petitions which I had learnt as a child,—I could not bring myself to think that I, who was so regular in attendance at the house of God, who read my Bible, who tried to understand theological books, and so on,—

I could not admit that I had a righteousness which was only like filthy rags, fit for nothing but to be burned. I tell you, dear friends, I did not like that ugly truth, and I fought very hard against it; but I bless God that he took away "the first" righteousness that he might establish "the second." That second—"the righteousness which is of God by faith,"—the righteousness which is imputed to everyone who believeth in Jesus,—is so much superior to "the first" that I can truly say with the apostle Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Is there anybody here who is having his righteousness tugged at as mine was? Is that beautiful but flimsy house of your own righteousness beginning to tumble about your ears? Did a big brick-bat come down just now? Was there a slate or two blown off the roof, or did the chimney-pots begin to fall? Thank God for it! Thank God for it! If you have a very fine robe of righteousness, all of your own weaving, I am not desirous that you should be unclothed, and left naked to your shame, but I am anxious that you should be clothed with that spotless robe which was woven in heaven; and I know that you will never wear that wondrous garment until your own dirty rags are pulled off you. Christ never comes and puts his glorious robes over our poor, beggarly, leprous rags. No; they must come off before he will clothe us, so he takes away "the first" that he may give us "the second." O poor sinner, be wise enough to cry to him, "Pull off my rags, Lord, if thou wilt condescend to touch them. I do not want to keep one of them a moment longer." As for you who are so good, and respectable, and righteous in your own esteem, I tell you plainly that those fine robes, of which you are so proud, are only rotten rags whatever you may think of them. Off with them! They must come off if you are to be saved; so ask God to take them off now, and to clothe you in that wondrous raiment which Christ has prepared for all who trust him.

There is another first thing which God has taken away from us, and that is, *our false peace.* There are many of you who used to be perfectly happy although you were unsaved; you were full of peace, and were not disturbed in mind at all. Why should you be? You used to say to yourselves, "Well, if it goes ill with me, I am sure it will be worse for my neighbours. If I am not all right, there are very few people who are." Yes, you said to yourself, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. If, sometimes, your minister preached a sermon that came rather too closely home to you, and troubled your conscience, you said to yourself, "Now, that is the kind of preaching that I do not like. I do not think I shall go to hear that man any more; for, in my opinion, people ought not to be made so uncomfortable as I have been made." There are some

people who would never have been saved if the Holy Spirit had not broken down their refuges of lies.

There is another "first" that people do not like to lose; that is, *their fancied strength.* You thought, dear friend, that you could repent and believe in Christ whenever you pleased, and you said to yourself, "There is no hurry for me to decide to be a Christian. I can keep on attending the means of grace; and one of these days, when it is convenient, I will break my own heart, renew my own will, create myself a new creature in Christ Jesus." That was your meaning; though, possibly, you did not express it quite so plainly. Ah! I recollect well when first I began to discover my own inability in spiritual things; it was a horrible discovery. I wanted to do good, but I found that evil was present with me. I longed to repent, but my heart was as hard as a stone. I earnestly desired to pray, but I could not pray a believing prayer; I could as easily have leaped over the moon as have prayed such a prayer by my own unaided efforts. I really wished to believe in Christ; and though now it seems as plain and simple a thing as anything can be; yet, at that time, I could no more believe in Christ than I could make a new world. Oh, the horror of having one's strength all taken away! But what a blessed thing it is to lose all our first strength, to be reduced to utter weakness, and to be quite incapable of any spiritual action, so that Christ says to us, "Without me ye can do nothing;" and all this in order that he may establish the second and better strength, and enable us each one to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

The Lord Jesus Christ becomes a strength and a power to us when we have lost our own; but we shall never get his strength while we have our own, for he will never yoke his omnipotence with our poor pretence of power. That cannot be: "He taketh away the first." He brings you to a swooning state, he brings you to a fainting fit, he brings you to death's door, he brings you to the very grave of your own personal confidence and strength; and then he comes in, and gives you life in himself, and clothes you with power from on high: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

Further on in the Christian life, it often happens that the same rule holds good, that the Lord takes away many first things to establish the second. After people are converted, it frequently happens that they have a great deal *too much confidence in their minister, or in some Christian friend.* At first, it is very helpful to their infant footsteps to have a little go-cart, to which they can hold, lest they should tumble down; but, after a while, when God means to teach them something for themselves, and to make them exercise their own judgments, perhaps he takes away that minister, or he takes away from them the pleasure that they once had in hearing him. Sometimes, I have known men so much depended upon that God has left those good men to themselves for a while, that their hearers might see what poor souls they were, and so might never depend upon them again as they had done in the past. Why does the Lord take away that comfortable repose that his

poor babes enjoy on the breasts of their teachers? Why, in order that they may find a better and sweeter repose on his own breast; that they may get away from all confidence in men, and come to full confidence in the Lord their God and Saviour. It is often a very hard lesson for some to learn; but it must be learned. As the apostle Paul says, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." There are some who seem to know Christ only by the teaching of other people; but it is far better to know him by personal contact with him, by coming close to him for yourself; and that blessing is often not realized except at a great expense of things once highly prized. In that sense also our text is true: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

So, too, there is *an early joy* that young Christians have. Oh, how full of delight they are! Some of them have a great deal more of flame than they have of real fire. Just as, when a fire is first kindled, and the shavings and the sticks are burning, there is not half the fire that there will be when the coals themselves are all aglow;—there is not half the fire, but there is more blaze and more crackle; so is it with many young people, they have no end of a blaze! Oh, they are so happy! They cannot tell how happy they are! But, after a while, that exuberance of joy goes, and the quiet delight in the Lord which comes afterwards, instead of it, is much more solid and deep. They can give good reasons for their joy; and though they are not so full of exhilaration as they were, their delight is really firmer, and stronger, and deeper than before: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

I have known many of God's dear people to be very frightened by some of their first experiences. They thought they were going to be lost because their early joy had departed from them; yet there was no need for cherishing such fears. You know that children lose their first teeth; it is good that they should do so, because there is a better set coming. And, often, it is very much like that with the Christian. He has a wisdom tooth to cut that he did not cut in the first stages of his spiritual life; and the first milk teeth that he has will have to come out, some of them, with many a painful tug; but they will have to come out in order that he may grow to a spiritual manhood: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

Oh, how many things you and I have still to gain by losing! How much we are to be enriched by our losses! How we are to make progress by going backward! How we have yet to mount by sinking! How we have yet to rise by descending! Paradoxical as all this may seem, it is to be so, according to the rule laid down in our text: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." There may be a lesson here, not only for young converts, but also for you who are experienced Christians. This passage may help you to understand some things which, perhaps, have seemed dark to you.

IV. Now I close by giving you some INSTANCES TO BE EXPECTED to

which the rule of the text will apply: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

Let all who are of the family of Christ remember that *God will soon take away from us everything that we have here below.* He will take us away from it, which is the same thing as taking it away from us. But, as you anticipate this great change, do not look forward to it with sorrow; do not shed a single tear of regret at the thought of parting with anything that you now possess. Regret not the dear old house at home, notwithstanding all its happy associations. Mourn not that you must leave your beloved country, of which you say that, wherever you wander, it is still the joy of your heart. You will have to leave your native land, and to leave your happy home; but you may be comforted by the assurance of the text, "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second;" for there is a better country, that is, the heavenly land. We, who believe in Jesus, are citizens of the New Jerusalem; and as all earthly cities and the fair prospects of the country shall melt away from our eyes, we shall look upon a fairer land, and a more glorious city, where no fog or blight shall ever come; but where—

"Rocks and hills, and brooks and vales,
With milk and honey flow.

"All o'er those wide extended plains,
Shines one eternal day;
There God the Sun for ever reigns,
And scatters night away.

"No chilling winds, or poisonous breath,
Can reach that healthful shore:
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and fear'd no more."

God will take away our home on earth; but in our Father's house above, there are many mansions; therefore you may go, cheerful fireside; you may go, happy home; all that was loved, all that was delighted in, may melt away, as I sing,—

"My Father's house on high,
Home of my soul! how near,
At times, to faith's foreseeing eye,
Thy golden gates appear!"

If Moses, from the top of Pisgah, was glad to die with the earthly Canaan in sight, how much more may we be happy to die with the heavenly Canaan just before us, into which we are to enter! "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

The Lord has been taking away from some of you *considerable portions of your family.* Some dear children, who were once nestling at your breast, are now with him in glory. Father also has gone, and mother; husband or wife, brother or sister, some of these dear ones are gone home. The members of your family have nearly all gone now, and you are left alone. You begin to count the friends of your youth upon your fingers. God is evidently taking

away "the first." But do not forget how blessedly he is establishing "the second." When you enter heaven, you will be no stranger inside those pearly gates. There will be many there, whom you knew and loved on earth, whom you will know and love above. They will meet you at the gates, and they will joy and rejoice with you before the great Father's throne.

"Alas!" says one, "I have lost all my family, and I am left alone and desolate." But if you are a child of God, remember what the apostle once wrote, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." Though God has taken away that first family, he has established that second, and far more numerous, and more glorious one. "God setteth the solitary in families." That is what he has done for you; he has taken away your first family connections, your first bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood, in order that he may establish the second higher relationships. He has dissolved the ties of blood that you may find better spiritual relationships among such as Jesus spoke of when he said, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Even so we say of the saints on earth, and the saints before the throne of God in heaven, "These are sister, and brother, and father, and mother to us." "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

And, brothers and sisters, *this poor body of ours*, which is so full of aches and pains at times, will be taken away to make room for a more glorious one. This one is getting worn-out; some parts of it have fallen away already. It is like an old lath-and-plaster building, and cannot last much longer; it very seldom stands to the end of the ninety-nine years' lease, but it soon crumbles away; and, by-and-by, with all of us, the old house will fall to pieces, and be done with. Shall we fret over it? Shall our soul cry, concerning the body, "Alas, my sister! Alas, my brother"? No; "he taketh away the first, that he may establish the second;" and as we have, in this body of our humiliation, borne the image of the earthy, we shall, in the second condition of this body, bear the image of the heavenly. It shall be sown in dishonour, but it shall be raised in glory. It shall be sown in weakness, but it shall be raised in power. It shall be sown a natural body, but it shall be raised a spiritual body. "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." And, oh, what a glorious second that will be! Our resurrection body will know no pain, no weariness, no weakness, no taint of disease or sin, no possibility of corruption or death. Well may we sing,—

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!"

when this poor body shall be made like unto the glorious body of Christ Jesus our Saviour. "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." Let the first go, then, without a murmur or a sigh.

Once more, *this earth shall be taken away to make room for the new one.* In a little while, there shall be heard the blast of the

archangel's trumpet. I know not when or how the various closing events will happen, so as to put them together in chronological order; but I do know that, at God's bidding, this fair earth shall suddenly be wrapt in flames. It is a beautiful world, say what you will about it. In many other parts besides Ceylon,—

> "Every prospect pleases,
> And only man is vile."

Wherever man squats down, and raises up his long ranges of bricks and mortar, there everything is ugly; but out yonder, in God's forests, and on God's hills, and by God's sea, there everything is fair, and grand, and God-like, as if God himself might come and sojourn here, and not be ashamed of the world he has made, for still it is good. But, in a moment, it will be wrapt in flames, and it will be utterly consumed. Nothing of this present creation shall abide in its present condition. The apostle Peter says, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Yet weep not, beloved, neither lament, for Peter also says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second;" and, on a brighter morning than your eyes have ever seen, you shall wake up and see the new heavens and the new earth; and you, with all the spirits of just men made perfect, shall come hither to sing sweeter songs than the morning stars chanted when the world was first created. There will be a second creation, a second world, for the Lord will have taken away the first, but he will have established the second. The work of destruction will have been accomplished; but the work of re-creation will also have been finished; and, oh, what joy and bliss it will be for the redeemed from among men, and for the holy angels, too, when the New Jerusalem shall come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he shall dwell among them! "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

I close by saying that it is my earnest prayer that some of you may, by God's grace, have your "first" taken away from you this very hour, that you may have "the second" given to you. Salvation lies not in "the first." That is all ruin and woe; the trail of the serpent is over it all. You will never go to heaven if you remain in the same nature as you had when you were born. You must be born a second time; or else, if there be not a second birth, you will have to endure the second death. God give you the grace to believe in Jesus, and to find in him that second, higher, better life that you may enter into the second and perfect world; for, then, you will give him all the praise for ever and ever. Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—563, 433, 540.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EXAMINATION BEFORE COMMUNION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 4TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 2nd, 1881.

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."—1 Corinthians xi. 28.

IT can never be too clearly understood that spiritual ordinances are for spiritual persons only. Baptism and the Lord's supper belong to believers, and to none but believers; and it is an evil thing for any church to give either the one or the other of those two ordinances to those who are destitute of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." There would have been no necessity for Paul to say, "Let a man examine himself," if the Lord's table were free to all. If every man might come to it, then every man might come simply because he was a man, and he would have no occasion to examine himself at all. The very fact that there is an examination presupposes that there are some persons who have no right to "eat of that bread, and drink of that cup;" and our own personal examination is in order that we may discover whether we have a right to participate in this ordinance or not. Therefore, let every man clearly understand that the Lord's table is for the Lord's people. As, in a man's house, his table is for his family; so, in God's house, his table is for his family; and if we do not belong to the family of God, we have no right to draw near to his table at all.

I fear that there are some unconverted people who imagine that they have performed a meritorious action when, on certain days in the year, they have, as they say, "taken the sacrament." But, my friend, if your heart is not right with God, you were a thief and a robber when you came to his table, and took what he provided for his children alone. You did not come in by the door, that is, Christ; but you climbed up some other way, and you were really sinning against God in that very act which you supposed to have some merit in it. Unless you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, unless you have been born again by the effectual operation of the

Holy Spirit, unless you truly belong to the household of faith, as you have no part in the spiritual mystery, so you have no right to the outward and visible sign by which that mystery is set forth. All this is implied in our text: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

The ordinance of the Lord's supper is not meant for the conversion of sinners; it is not specially intended to lead men to salvation, but it is intended for those who are already saved, those who are converted. I have heard of unconverted persons coming to the Lord's table, and the solemn impressions experienced there have led them to repentance, and faith in Christ. We must always recollect that God works how he pleases; and, in such cases as those, he overlooked the communicants' great mistake, and even in the midst of their error he wrought according to the sovereignty of his divine grace. Yet this is no excuse for ungodly persons venturing to come to the communion table, for they will be eating and drinking condemnation to themselves; and if it should please God to forgive the transgression, and to save their souls, this will be an exception, and a surprising work of grace, for it is not according to the law of the Master's house. If any of you think that, by being baptized and coming to the Lord's table, you will thereby be saved, you "err, not knowing the Scriptures." You have no right to either ordinance till you have first come to Christ, and are saved; but when you have passed from death unto life, when you have been washed in the Saviour's precious blood, then is your time to come forward, and, by being buried with Christ in baptism, avow your conversion; and, by sitting with your fellow-believers at his table, and meditating upon his wondrous sacrifice, of which the bread and the wine are the significant symbols, feed the spiritual life that God has imparted to you.

Having given you this plain warning, I now come to my text, which teaches us, first, *the object of the examination commanded in it:* "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Secondly, it points out to us *the matter of that examination;* and, thirdly, *the duty that follows after the examination:* "Let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

I. First, our text teaches us THE OBJECT OF THE EXAMINATION COMMANDED IN IT: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

The distinct object of the examination is *that the communicant may eat and drink at the Lord's table.* In some churches, there is a practice which is called "fencing the tables," defending the table of the Lord against the approach of improper characters. This is a very right and necessary thing to do, but some ministers have so guarded the table that very few have dared to come to it; and those who have come have often been persons who had more conceit than grace, while the better part—the truly humble and broken-hearted ones—have been frightened away. It would appear, from the exhortations of these ministers, as if Paul must have said, "Let a man examine himself, but never let him eat of

this bread, nor drink of this cup. Let him so examine himself that he shall come to the conclusion that he has no right to sit at the table of the Lord, and therefore shall go his way feeling that he is utterly unworthy of that high privilege." Beloved friends, this is not my object in preaching from this text, nor should it be yours in obeying it. Examine yourselves with the hope and the strong desire that you may be permitted to come to the table. Do not let the examination take so morbid and melancholy a form that you almost look out for causes of self-suspicion; but the rather, especially as many of you have known the Lord for years, let your examination be made in order that you may come aright to the table, that you may come there in a right spirit, and not that you may be compelled to stay away. "Let a man examine himself," and then, in the spirit of self-examination, let him eat of this bread, and drink of this cup.

Distinctly recollect that the qualification for a place at the Lord's table is not perfect sanctification. If it were, I am afraid that there would not be a soul here so qualified; and if there should be one who declared that he had attained to such a state, I should expect that he would prove to be the biggest hypocrite in the place. Recollect, also, that the qualification for coming to the Lord's table is not the full assurance of faith. There might be some genuine believers in Christ, who would not be able to commune if that were the qualification; but, happily, it is not. The least grain of true faith in Christ qualifies you. You are not to examine to see whether it is full noontide with your soul; have you even a little twilight? Have you been quickened into new life so much as to have a holy hungering and thirsting for more of the Christ who is already yours? If so, you may come to his table. Do not arrange the examination in such a way as to exclude yourselves unnecessarily. I will not, if I can help it, put it in such a style as to exclude one of you who ought to be admitted. On the contrary, my soul longs that the whole of you might truly feel and say, "Yes, we do love the Lord, and we are anxious to come and obey his command, and thus show his death in remembrance of him."

Well, that is the first great object of this examination,—not that you may be made to stop away, but that you may come, if you are really entitled to sit at the table of your Lord.

Note, next, that another object of this examination is *that every man may know that the responsibility of his coming to the Lord's table rests wholly with himself:* "Let a man examine himself, and so let him" come. Not, "Let a man go to his minister, and be examined;" or, "Let him go to his priest, and make confession." No, no: "Let a man examine *himself*, and so let him eat." I can give no man a certificate which really entitles him to come to the communion table. In my office as pastor, it is my privilege to receive members into this church; but, by so doing, we never mean to imply that we thereby certify that they are really converted. That is a matter which must rest with each man; and his judgment of himself, if he is a wise man, will not be the opinion of his

minister, but the verdict of his own conscience in the sight of God. Come to this communion table, brothers and sisters, as individuals; come each one feeling, "I alone am responsible to God for what I am about to do. Taking the Word of God as my guide, I judge myself to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, therefore, I am about to sit at this table." I think that, of all abominations, the idea of sponsors, either in baptism or the Lord's supper, is the most detestable. No man can be a sponsor for another; every one of you must individually stand before God; and no godfathers or godmothers can, without telling a lie, promise for you that you shall keep God's holy commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life. It is not in their power, neither is it in the power of any minister, to give you the right to come to this table, or to the other Christian ordinance: "Let a man examine *himself*." Take the responsibility upon yourself, each one of you, for so the apostle puts it, and this will help you to come aright to the table of the Lord. You are bidden to examine yourself, in order that you may come under an overwhelming sense that it is your own act and deed,—that you are not here because your mother came or your father came,—that you are not here because you are entitled to come by virtue even of your church-membership; but you are here each woman, each man, each one of you, for himself or herself, having searched your own heart, and asked God to search it, to see whether you ought to come, or not.

In the next place, the object of this examination is *that everyone may come to the table most solemnly*;—not flippantly, thoughtlessly, heedlessly; but that each communicant may say, "I am going to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, in resemblance of my dear Lord whom I do really love and trust. There is no mockery, or mere formality in this act. I come in downright earnest, bringing my heart with me; for I have looked into my heart, I have examined myself, and I take upon myself the responsibility of saying, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'" So this examination means that you are to come to the table with deep solemnity.

And, surely, it also means *that every communicant must come most humbly*, for the result of any true examination of ourselves must be deep humiliation of spirit. As for myself, I must confess that I am not what I want to be, and I am not what I ought to be. I can only come to the table declaring myself to be an unworthy one in whom the grace of God is indeed magnified. That he should ever have put me among his children, and permitted me to call him my Father, will be a wonder to me throughout eternity. See, then, the blessed result of this self-examination when it lays you low at the foot of the cross, and makes you come to the table, not boasting, "I have a right to be here," but humbly and gratefully saying, "I do indeed adore the grace of God which has made it possible that such an one as I am should be allowed to sit down with the family of God at his banqueting table of love."

Another result of the examination which is aimed at is, *that we may come to the Lord's supper intelligently*, knowing why we come,

and what reason we have to come, and on what footing we come. Examining yourself, you will discover your soul-hunger, and learn that you come to be fed. Examining yourself, you will discover spiritual life, and understand that you come that it may be nourished by your meditation upon the person of your Lord. You know, in holy ordinances, almost everything depends upon the right understanding of them. There is no efficacy in water, whether it be applied by immersion or by aspersion; the value of the ordinance depends upon the conviction which the man has, when he is baptized, that it is the will of his Lord that he should thus confess his faith. There is nothing efficacious in that bread or that wine; the bread has no more virtue in it than there is in any other bread which the baker ever made. The wine is, in itself, no more a means of grace than any other wine that ever was pressed out from the vintage. It is the thought that shall be excited by that bread and that wine that will be the benefit; it is the mind seeing through the visible sign that which is inwardly signified. Hence it is that our Lord calls us to this self-examination, that our intellect may be stirred, and our mind may be prepared, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, to understand the meaning of that which he puts upon the table for us to feed upon.

And, just once more, this examination is intended *that we may come to the table with an appreciative joy.* Let me explain that rather long word. You know, if you come to the communion table saying, "I do not know whether I have a right to be here," you cannot enjoy yourself. If I were sitting at a man's table, and I said to myself, "I am afraid I have made a mistake; I do not believe he ever invited me," I should feel very uncomfortable while I was there, and I should be wonderfully glad when the dinner was over. But if, as I sat at the table, I said, "I know the gentleman invited me, I have his invitation with me; and he is smiling upon me, for he is glad that I am here." That is how I like to feel at the Lord's table; to know, after examination, that I am in my right place. Then I soon forget all about my right to be there, and all I think of is that which is on the table, and about my Lord who has invited me, and how I can enjoy the sweetest converse with him, and partake of the dainties which he has put before me.

I want you, brothers and sisters, to examine yourselves till you come to this conclusion, "Yes; we are not perfect, but we do believe in Jesus; we are not fully assured yet, but we have a humble hope in him; we are not the strongest of his warriors, but we have his life in us; we do know him, and trust him." Then you will feel, "The good Shepherd feeds the lambs as well as the full-grown sheep of his flock, so we may come to him for all we need." Then you will have nothing to think about as to yourself, but all you will have to do will be to say, "My Lord here gives me his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink, after a spiritual fashion. In these outward types, now will I feed upon him. The fact that God took our nature upon himself, shall be as food to my soul. The equally blessed fact that, being found in fashion as a man, he took my

sins upon himself, and suffered in my stead, shall be like generous wine to me. I will drink it down; I will feed upon it; I will live by it." Then you will have joy and gladness in your soul; and this supper will be what it really is,—no funeral feast, but a banquet of delight for all the friends of Christ. "Let a man examine himself" with the view that he may so eat and so drink when he does come to the table of his Lord.

II. Now, very briefly, I must dwell upon the second point, which is this, THE MATTER OF THE EXAMINATION: "Let a man examine himself." Listen, brothers and sisters, while I ask you a few questions which will help you to examine yourselves.

First, then, *here is a spiritual feast.* Am I spiritually alive, to partake of it? Dead men have no right to come to a banquet. Am I, then, spiritually alive? Have I ever been quickened and renewed in heart and life? Has the Holy Spirit brought me into the spiritual world? If so, have I an appetite for this sacred feast? Do I hunger after Christ? Do I long for the water of life? Then, I may come to this table, for here my Lord supplieth the wants of those who are the living in Zion. The dead cannot feed on the richest dainties, corpses can neither eat nor drink; and dead sinners may not come to this festival for the living. But, if there be even a spark of spiritual life in thee, though thou art faint and sick, come along, for thou hast a right to come.

The next question is,—Here is a feast; but am I a friend of the Lord who is the Host at this table? The Lord Jesus invites all his friends to come to his banquets; am I, then, his friend; and is he mine? Have I ever taken him to be my Saviour, and am I trusting in his precious blood for my salvation? And then, in return, do I love him, and love his cause, and love his people? Do I commune with him as friend communes with friend? Do I talk familiarly with him? Am I on intimate terms with him? Does he know me, and do I truly know him? If so, I need not be afraid to come to his table, for every friend of his is welcome there. Ask yourself these three questions. Am I alive? Have I a spiritual appetite? Is Christ my friend?

Next, *this feast is meant to set forth the death of Christ.* That fact suggests another question. Do I really believe in his death? Of course, I believe that he died; but do I really myself trust Christ's death to save me? Do I believe that, by his dying, he offered to God such an atonement for the sins of men that whosoever believeth in him is justified from all things? And have I, by faith, appropriated to myself his atonement so that I am thereby justified in the sight of God? If so, I may come to his table, for I am only doing then, in outward sign, what I am really doing also in my inward spirit.

Further, *our Lord Jesus bids us "do this" in union with all his people.* That suggests the question,—Am I one of his people, and one with them? Do I really love them? The apostle Paul says, "We being many are one bread,"—"one loaf,"—"and one body." Is our union as close as this? I think, brethren, that, if you have any malice or ill-will towards any of your fellow-Christians, or

towards anyone else, you ought not to come to the Lord's table while you are in that condition of heart. You remember that Christ said, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember est that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." The same rule applies to those who would be guests at this sacred feast. It is a hard thing for men to sit at the same table, and all the while to be, as it were, eating one another's hearts out. No, no; there must be true love among the brotherhood; and if I have not love to all the people of God, I have no right to come to the table of the Lord.

Once more, *this cup is the new covenant in Christ's blood.* That truth leads me to ask another question,—Am I in covenant with God in Christ Jesus? Have I accepted the covenant of grace? Have I yielded myself up to God by bringing to the great Father the sacrifice of Christ, which is the seal and ratification of the covenant? Do I regard myself, at this moment, as one of the covenanted ones to whom the promises of God belong? If so, I may certainly drink of the cup of the covenant.

Moreover, *Jesus bids us observe this ordinance in remembrance of him.* Now, a man cannot remember what he never knew. Here, then, is another question,—Do I know Christ? Have I ever seen him with the eye of faith? Did I ever behold him hanging on the tree, and feel the burden of sin roll off my shoulders as I witnessed his amazing sufferings? In a word, do I really know Christ? Do I speak with him in prayer? Do I commune with him, and tell him my griefs and sorrows? Or, am I a stranger to him? A stranger to Christ may not eat of this feast; but he, who is acquainted with the great Lord who sits at the head of the table, may freely come, and eat and drink that which is set before him.

These are some very plain and simple questions which I beg you to put to yourselves; and if you do not know Christ, if you do not love him, if you do not love his people, if you are not trusting in his blood, if you have never been born again, if you have nothing of the grace of God in you, get you far off from his table, I pray you, for you would only be eating and drinking condemnation to yourselves if you partook of the emblems of Christ's broken body and shed blood. But if you have the least evidence of a work of grace within your soul, if you have the feeblest faith,—so long as it is true faith,—if you really are resting in Jesus for salvation, come and welcome to his table.

> "How happy are thy servants, Lord,
> Who thus remember thee!"

III. This brings me to the third head, which is, THE DUTY AFTER THE EXAMINATION: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

If you can satisfactorily answer all the questions I have given you, it is your duty to come to the table of your Lord, and to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. I know some professing Christians,—I hope they are really Christians,—it is not my place

to judge them; but the commands of Christ seem to be very trifling and inconsiderable things with them. What would you think of anyone who said that he was a disciple of a certain teacher, but he did not care to observe his teacher's commands? Why, you would say that he was trifling with his master. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke thus plainly concerning one of the two ordinances which he instituted: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Yet we have met with a number of his professed followers who say, "Well, that baptism is not a saving ordinance." Who said that it was? Would you attend to it if it were? Then, if you only mean to do what will pay you, your obedience will be selfish, and of small value. Are you really a disciple of Christ? It should be the delight of a disciple to do what his Master bids him, whether there is any visible benefit to him in it, or not. It is not for you or me, beloved, to question or cavil at anything which our Lord has commanded, but promptly to obey it. Another person says, "Well, I never come to the communion table, but I am just as good as those people who do." My dear friend, I will not quarrel with you about your own goodness; but I generally find that those who think that they are good are not as good as they think they are. However, if the Lord Jesus Christ has given you this plain command, "This do in remembrance of me," I ask you, believing it to be commanded by Christ, how can you call yourself his servant when you refuse to do what he bids you? I am not putting the question too strongly. You know that I have no faith in the saving power of ordinances. Do I not, as clearly as I can speak, constantly warn you against that error? Still, if it were only the picking up of a straw, and if Christ had commanded it, I do not see how a man could be sure that he was the servant of Christ if he did not pick up that straw when his Master told him to do it. The less the thing is in itself, the more does it become the test of our obedience. If these ordinances were essential to salvation, then everybody would observe them with the view of being saved by them; but, inasmuch as they do not save, and were never meant to save, but are, in fact, only the privileges of those who are saved, the observance of them becomes a test of a man's true discipleship, for it makes it clear whether he will obey Christ or not.

"Well," says one, "I have examined myself, and I do not feel that I have a right to come to the Lord's table." Then, do not come, my friend, as you are. Still, it is your duty to get into such a state that, when you again examine yourself, you shall be able to say, "Now I have a right to come;" for, if you have not a right to come to the Lord's table, then you have no right to enter heaven. If you are not fit to commune with the saints on earth, you certainly are not fit to commune with the saints above. So look to that matter at once, I pray you; and look to it very carefully.

After examination, it appears from the text that *it is the duty of every man who has examined himself to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* It is very noteworthy that the Holy Spirit should have moved the mind of Paul to put it in this shape: "let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Especially observe that he

mentions the cup. "No," says the Romish priest, "it is not for you. When I go up to the altar, as a priest, I drink the wine in that cup. It is not for you, you must not meddle with it. The cup does not belong to the laity." What shall I say to such a man? With what burning words shall I express the indignation that I feel against the apostate church that dares to withhold what Christ has so freely given? "There," says he to his disciples, "all of you drink of that cup;" and in comes a man who pretends to be a priest, and he says, "You shall not touch it." By that mark, as by many more, can the beast and the antichrist still be discovered at this day, even as of old. Still does the cry ring out from heaven, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues;" for plagues must come upon the arrogant priesthood that dares to take away from God's people that which Christ puts on the table, and of which he says, "Drink ye all of it."

It is your duty, as Christians, to see to it that ye eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, after you have examined yourselves, and proved that you are really on the Lord's side.

I will not prolong this exhortation further than to remind you that it is not only your duty to eat and drink, but "*so*" *to eat and drink as to discern the Lord's body:* "Let a man examine himself, and *so* let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." "So." That is one of the biggest little words in the English language; you remember one text where it is very big: "God *so* loved the world," —measure that word if you can,—"God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here, in our text, is another instance in which the word "so" is very big indeed. After examination of himself, a man is "so" to eat—in the spirit which that examination produces, which I have shown you is one of solemnity, and humiliation, and earnest delight in Christ: "so let him eat,"—so as to discern the Lord's body, which means just this. I take that bread, and I say, "This represents to me the great truth that God was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and that, to-day, he is one with men as well as one with God. I eat that bread, and I feed spiritually on that truth." Then I take the cup, and I say, "This cup represents to me the blood of Christ, and I see in this cup the symbol that he died, 'the Just for the unjust,' to bring me to God. I take this wine to represent the blood of his atonement, the great fact that he died as my Substitute; and as I drink the wine, and it goes into my inward parts, I take the precious truth of substitution, Christ dying instead of me, and I put it into my very soul to nourish, to cherish, and to delight me." Now, that is the way to discern the Lord's body, and that is the way "so" to eat of that bread, and to drink of that cup, as to be spiritually profited. May God, the Holy Spirit, help you to enter into the spirit of the ordinance, and to observe it as Christ ordained it, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW XXVI. 17—30; AND 1 CORINTHIANS XI. 20—34.

Matthew xxvi. Verses 17, 18. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.*

See here the blending of Christ's humiliation and his Godhead. The Master had no room of his own in which he could keep the passover. He had not even where to lay his head; yet such was his power, that he had only to send messengers to one whom he knew, though perhaps the man knew not him; and as soon as ever the message was delivered, the large upper room, furnished and prepared, was at once freely tendered for the celebration of the supper. Jesus Christ, even in his lowest estate, had the hearts of all men beneath his control.

19—21. *And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

This was a very unpleasant thought to bring into the midst of those who were gathered there for the memorial feast, yet it was most suitable for such a message to be spoken at the passover, for at its institution the Lord said to Moses, "With bitter herbs they shall eat it;" and here was something bitter enough. I hope we shall have our Master's presence at the communion table, yet it will be well for our joy to be sobered with such a painful thought as this,—there may be a traitor with us even here.

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

The habit of self-suspicion, rather than suspecting somebody else, is a good one. If there is anyone in this place who is going to commit a gross sin, why may it not be myself? The natural tendency of each one of us is to say, "I shall never do such a thing as that, I am sure." Ah, me! If grace were truly reigning in our heart, we should each one be suspicious of himself, and not of others, and the question of each one would be, "Lord, is it I?" Not one of the apostles asked, "Lord, is it Judas?" or, "Is it So-and-so?" but every one of them began to say unto him, "Lord, is it I?"

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

Remember, this "woe" applies, not only to Judas Iscariot, but to anyone else who betrays Christ. Oh! if, under the pressure of persecution, or if, being bribed by some present pleasure, or if, through our own natural fickleness, we should betray our Master, woe unto us! May the Lord, by his almighty grace, keep us from committing such a sin as that! If we do betray our Lord, it would have been better for us that we had not been born.

25, 26. *Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. And as they were eating,—*

While yet the paschal supper was proceeding: "As they were eating,"—

26. *Jesus took bread, and blessed it,—*

Or, as the marginal reading says, "gave thanks for it,"—

26. *And brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.*

That is to say, "This represents my body." Our Lord could not possibly have meant that the bread was his body, for there was his body sitting whole and entire at the table; and they would have been astonished beyond measure if they had understood him literally. But they did not do so, for they were well used to the Oriental custom of leaving out the word for "like", and just saying, "It is so-and-so." Besides, Christ had also said, "I am the door," "I am the way," "I am the good Shepherd;" and there is also that striking sentence, "I am the rose of Sharon." No idiot ever understood these passages literally; and those are more foolish than idiots who render literally these words: "This is my body." They are wickedly, and wantonly, and wilfully foolish, in thus misrepresenting our Saviour's meaning.

27. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;*

That is, "Drink of it, every one of you." Was this the institution of the Lord's supper? Yes; but what say the Romanists? Why, that the people may not drink of the cup, and so they keep it away from them; but our Saviour says to this representative company of all his disciples, "Drink ye all of it."

28, 29. *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

"In that joy-day, that day of days, when the battle will have been fought, and the victory won for ever, then will I pledge you in my Father's kingdom, and keep the feast with you for ever there."

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Oh, how brave it was on the Master's part to sing a Psalm just before he went out to be betrayed and to be crucified!

Our second reading is also concerning the Lord's supper. Turn to the first Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 20.

The Corinthian church, as I have often explained to you, was one that had no pastor. They had what is called "open" worship, everybody speaking who pleased; and there being no kind of government or discipline, they fell into every sort of disorder conceivable, and even the ordinance of the Lord's supper was utterly degraded among them. Here is what Paul wrote to them:—

1 Corinthians xi. Verses 20, 21. *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

They had such low notions of the communion that they seemed to think that, if they ate together, each one bringing his own provision, they would be celebrating the Lord's supper; but Paul would not agree to that. What said he?

22. *What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.*

They may not have meant to do so ill, but they had fallen into all sorts of disorder, and Paul therefore first rebuked them, and then explained to them the right observance of the ordinance.

23—27. *For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*

Note carefully the wording of this verse; it is not, "Whosoever, being unworthy, shall eat and drink." It is not an adjective, it is an adverb; and relates, not so much to the person, as to the way in which he came to the communion. Those who came to the Lord's table in a half-drunken fashion, those who regarded it merely as a common meal, those who came there under false pretences, those who came there not thinking of Christ's body at all; they would all be guilty of not discerning the Lord's body, and so of prostituting his ordinance, robbing it of its dignity and solemnity by coming there in such a condition.

28, 29. *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily,—*

We are all unworthy to come to the table of our Lord; who among us can possibly be thought to be worthy to come to such a feast as this? But the apostle is writing concerning those who came there carelessly, or without thought, or with a wrong motive. Years ago, you know, nobody could hold certain government or municipal offices without taking what was called "the sacrament." That was making the Lord's supper a picklock to office; that was indeed to eat and drink it "unworthily." Such also as come merely for the sake of getting alms, or out of custom or formality, but leave their hearts behind them, eat and drink unworthily, and shall be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,"—as guilty as they were who actually crucified the Saviour. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily"—

29. *Eateth and drinketh "condemnation" to himself,—*

For that is how the word should be rendered,—

29, 30. *Not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*

God is always carrying out a system of discipline in his Church. To a large extent, he lets the world, for the present, sin as it pleases; but in his own family he uses the rod; and when the Lord's supper is dishonoured, there is no doubt that the sickness and sleep here mentioned still follow. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Many even die;—not that they are lost,—not that this sickness is sent as a curse, but as fatherly chastisement; and the death of many of its members is often a chastisement to the church which is thus weakened by losing its best helpers.

31—34. *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.*

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—282, 581.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 11TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Lord's-day Evening, in the autumn of 1858.

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—2 Peter iii. 18.

IT is worth while to remark that this passage immediately follows the seventeenth verse, where the apostle says, "Beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." He puts the one after the other, as if the one must be the means of the other. There had been some, in the apostle's day, who had wrested, to their own destruction, certain expressions in the Epistles of Paul which Peter said were "hard to be understood;" and, therefore, he warned Christian men and women to take heed lest they, "being led away with the error of the wicked," should "fall from" their "own stedfastness." In order that they might know how to stand, and to be preserved from falling, he gave them this direction: "grow in grace;" for the way to stand is to grow; the way to be steadfast is to go forward. There is no standing except by progression. If you see even such a simple thing as a child's toy rolling along your floor at home, you will observe that it will always stand upright as long as it keeps on rolling; but when it stops, down it goes. So is it with the Christian; as long as he is in motion, so long he stands; but if it were possible for the motion to cease, then the Christian would fall from his steadfastness. Glory be to God, he will be kept from falling, and he shall be presented faultless before the throne of God! The way to stand, then, is to go forward; the way to be steadfast is to progress; the way to be alive, according to the apostle, is to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

We will offer, first of all, two or three remarks upon *growth "in grace" in general;* and, secondly, a few remarks upon *growth in grace being intimately connected with growth "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

I. First, then, we shall offer some remarks upon GROWTH "IN GRACE" IN GENERAL. What shall we say about it?

The first remark we make is, that *there is a sense in which there is no such thing at all as growth in grace.* If you understand the word grace as signifying free favour, and the love of God towards his people, there is not, and there cannot be, any growth in that at all.

> **"The moment a sinner believes,**
> **And trusts in his crucified God,"—**

he is, by the grace of God, there and then justified, and complete in Christ Jesus. And if he lives till his hair is grey, he will never be more justified, and never be more beloved, than he is the very first moment in which he believes in Christ. As soon as ever I have a vital connection with the Lamb of God, I am "in grace." Let me live on, let my grace grow, let my faith increase, let my zeal become warmer, let my love be more ardent, yet I shall not be more "in grace" than I was before. God will not love me more, he will not have a deeper and a purer affection in his heart to me then than he has the very first moment when I turn to him; nor will his grace the less justify me, or less accept me, the first moment when I come to him with all my sins about me, than it shall do when I stand before the throne. We never grow in the grace of election. We are always, as Peter says in his first Epistle, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;" and in that sense of being "in grace" there is neither growth nor any retrograde movement. So also is it in the matter of justification.

> **"In union with the Lamb,**
> **From condemnation free,**
> **The saints for ever were,**
> **And shall for ever be."**

And they are at any one time as much justified as they are at any other time. Give me to be justified to-day, then I was justified yesterday, and I shall be justified to-morrow. As soon as I put my trust in the Saviour, I became complete in grace; so far as that was concerned, I was made perfect in Christ Jesus. I cannot be more than perfect; and, therefore, I cannot in that respect grow in grace; I cannot receive more justifying mercy; I cannot receive more pardoning grace; for I have had it all at once, and have so become perfect in Christ.

But you will remark that our text does not say anything about grace growing; it does not say that grace grows. It tells us to "grow in grace." There is a vast difference between grace growing and our growing in grace. God's grace never increases; it is always infinite, so it cannot be more; it is always everlasting; it is always bottomless; it is always shoreless. It cannot be more; and, in the nature of God, it could not be less. The text tells us to "grow in grace." We are in the sea of God's grace; we cannot be in a deeper sea, but let us grow now we are in it. We cannot be more in it than we are, or than we always have been. We are in God's grace;

we are in the covenant; we are in the scheme of redemption; we are in union with Jesus; we cannot be more or less so, for we are eternally secure through the blood of our Saviour. But while it cannot grow more, we can grow more in it, and so we shall "grow in grace."

I must make another remark. *It is certain that, while the grace of God toward us does not grow, yet there is such a thing as the development of grace.* There are some persons who strongly object to the doctrine of progressive sanctification, and to our mentioning anything like growth in grace. My brethren are welcome to object if they like, but I am sure, if they read the Scriptures (they will surely not object to Scriptural terms), they will find growth in grace very frequently mentioned; if that does not mean progressive sanctification, then I do not understand the term "growth in grace" at all. It is quite certain that there are degrees in the development of grace. You will surely not say that the young man, who has been converted only for the last few months, knows as much of grace, understands as much about it, and has as much faith, and as much love, as the man who has for the last twenty or thirty years been earnestly engaged in his Master's service. You will not tell me that one man, who is scarcely ever seen coming up to the house of God, and who is daily in a state of religious starvation, stands on a par in grace with a man who is labouring for his Master, whose love is evident to all, and whose faith is testified before the whole congregation. You will not tell me there is a dead level in Christianity, which all alike reach. If you do say so, I shall tell you that you have no eyes, or that you do not look about you. For it is certain that there are some who are further advanced than others are, some with greater faith than others have. There are "great faiths" as well as "little faiths", great loves as well as little loves; there are men of ardent spirits who have grace more fully developed in them than it is in others. It is true, they are not more loved of God than others are, and not more justified, nor more accepted, for in that respect we all stand on a level, and there is no difference; but as to the development of grace in our souls, and the display of grace in our lives, everyone must admit that there is a difference between different saints. I cannot understand the difference existing between various ministers of Christ, if it is not because of the difference in the degrees of grace which they possess. Some have just started in the Christian ministry, and have preached a little about redemption, but they have not gone far enough to preach about election; or, at least, not about the vital union of every blood-bought child of God with the person of Emmanuel; or if they should now and then preach upon that blessed truth, they cannot talk about the eternal security of the saints, and declare how, against wind and tide, they shall all sail safely into the heavenly harbour. They have not grown enough in grace to preach on such themes as these; so will not everyone admit that there are degrees of development in grace, while it is also true that there are none of us more justified, more elect, more chosen of God and loved of him than any other believers are?

Now for a third remark, which is, *that growth in grace is not to be measured by weeks, and months, and years.* There are persons who think that the age of a man will tell how much he knows about divine things. "Oh!" say some, "So-and-so is such a young man, what should he know about divine grace? There is a hoary-headed father there; he must know a great deal more." If you talk like that, you will soon find out your mistake. God often delights to show how he scorns and scoffs at all the distinctions of man. He makes the young men prudent, and he gives even to children knowledge and discretion. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he ordains strength because of his enemies. It is true, we do believe, and we should believe, that there is more knowledge beneath the grey hairs than under the youth's curly locks; generally speaking, it is so. Yet God, in order to display his sovereignty, has so arranged that he sometimes puts his treasures into an earthen vessel that has not been fashioned more than a few years.

Do not suppose that persons grow in grace according to their years. Some grow faster in grace in five minutes than others do in fifty years. I believe that some saints progress further in grace in one single month than others do in twelve months or twelve years. I am sure I may speak concerning myself. I have sometimes grown more in grace, in one hour, than I have at other seasons in a week, a month, or a year, when God, in his infinite wisdom, has been pleased to give me a vision of the Saviour, or to break up the fountains of wickedness that lay hidden in my soul. I have learnt more in one hour, when the Holy Spirit's hand has been upon me, than I have in weeks and months simply with my own study. God's people grow like trees grow. Sometimes they take a start, and grow upward; at another time, they are growing downward. Sometimes, apparently, the sap sleeps within the branch;—a winter time comes over it, and it is asleep.

Do not imagine, my dear friends, that because you are getting old, you are growing in grace. People are continually warning young men of their danger. No doubt we are in danger; but let me remind you that there is not an instance in Sacred Scripture of a young man disgracing his profession; but there are instances in Scripture of men of middle age and of grey hairs doing so. It is thus: we, who are young, are in the greatest danger; and, therefore, God upholds us to show the power of his grace; but some of you older folk conceive that you are not in peril; and, therefore, God suffers you to fall, that he may stain the pride of your self-glorying, and let you see that it is not anything in flesh, neither age, nor standing, nor rank, nor condition, which ensures our safety; but that he holdeth up the humble, and casteth down the proud. David did not fall into his great sin until he had come certainly to maturity, and into the very prime of life, and then he sinned with Bathsheba. Lot did not transgress so grossly before he became an old man. If you turn to the pages of Scripture, you will notice that, wherever there has been a lamentable fall,—as in the case of Peter,—it has been a man who has grown up, and become strong in years. God thus shows us that it is not mere years

that can teach us grace,—in fact, that years, and age, and learning, and talent, have nothing to do with grace; and he could, if he pleased, take a child six years old, and pour wisdom and knowledge into the lips of that child that could puzzle the seers of this world. He often takes the most unlikely instruments, and uses them for the accomplishment of his purposes; and because men have said that experimental preachers must have grey heads, he says, "Nay; it shall be a youth who shall lead the multitude; it shall be a child, out of whose mouth I will pour words of wisdom, for I will overthrow all human glory, and show mankind that it is not the preacher who is to be praised, but God." Salvation is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but it is God that showeth mercy. It is not the man who preaches, who accomplishes the work; but God working through the man. He could dispense with the man altogether if he pleased; at any rate, he will have the man he pleases, and at what age he pleases, and qualify him as he pleases.

Once more, *growth in grace is not to be estimated by our feelings.* There are some of you, beloved, who think you are not growing in grace because you do not feel so lively as you used to do. "Ah!" say you, "when I was young, everything was bright then. What peaceful hours I then enjoyed! I would go over hedge and ditch to hear the gospel preached; I had such an intense desire to hear about God and Jesus Christ, such love to the gospel that, when I once got to hear a minister preach, it mattered not whoever he might be, it all seemed sweet. But now I am so depressed that I cannot enjoy the truth as I used to do." Do not think, because your wild heat is gone, that you have not grown. When we light a fire, we always put the straw and kindling at the bottom; and when we first light it, there is a deal of flame, and a great deal of smoke. But, afterwards, when the flame gets hold of the coals, there is not so much blaze, but there is really more heat. You may have lost some of your flame and smoke, but then you have more solid fire; we would rather warm our hands by the coals than by the straw, for that must soon go. So is it with grace; it begins with a flame which catches the lighter substances, and lays hold on the imagination and the passions; but, in after life, it appeals to the judgment, and makes the man one solid lump of burning fire. He is not a little flame, rising towards heaven, that the wind might blow out with a puff; but he becomes so strong a fire that the wind shall but increase the flame, and shall make the heat the greater. So it may be with you. Perhaps you have become more solid though you are less fiery.

Do not suppose, when you are depressed, that, therefore, you are not growing. Many of God's plants grow best in the dark, and he often puts them in the dark to make them grow. When you are growing upwards, recollect that there is such a thing as growing downward. You may have had, yesterday, a divine manifestation that took you up to the top of the Delectable Mountains. You must not think you are big because you are up on high, for pigmies perched on Alps are pigmies still; and if you were ever so little,

it would not make you any bigger if you were taken to the top of St. Paul's. If, on the other hand, you are deep down in a mine, do not imagine that you are any the smaller for that reason. I can tell you that you will often grow faster in the dungeon than on the top of a mountain; but it is not a pleasant place to be in. When our depravity is revealed to us, when our desolation of spirit, and our utter hopelessness and powerlessness are uncovered and made manifest by God's Holy Spirit, we grow, I believe, even faster than we do when, on the wings of seraphs, we are privileged to mount on high. So, do not measure your growth in grace by your feelings. Some of you make a kind of barometer of your feelings. Do not do so. If we are in Christ, we are in Christ by faith, and not by feelings; and recollect that, whether your feelings are good or bad, you are no more or less a child of God. Your faith, sinner, unites you with the Lamb,—not your feelings. Trust him in darkness, trust him in distress, lean on him when you cannot see him; and when there seems nothing to walk on, still tread, for the ground is firm beneath the foot of faith.

Just by way of warning, let me urge you not to think that you are growing in grace *because you happen to be doing a little more for the church externally.* "Oh!" we often say, "now I am progressing, am I not? I am busy in the Sunday-school, labouring hard there; I am preaching; I am doing this, or that, or the other; now I am growing in grace." Ah! it is a proper thing to be diligent in good works, and to be abounding in acts of righteousness; but if you begin to say, "Now I am growing," because of this or because of that, you have made a great mistake. It often happens that, when we are very full of public labours, we are very short in private devotions. I must myself confess that it has been so with me;—and that is a very lamentable thing,—for then I was not really growing. A man may have his hands ever so full before the world, and think he is doing much; but he may not be really growing in grace after all. Do not think that this is an excuse for anybody who is not doing much, you Issachar-like people, like "a strong ass between two burdens," too lazy to lift either. I am not giving you a word of comfort. You are not growing, for you are doing nothing; and those who are doing something must not boast of their growth. It hath more to do with private devotion than with public exercise; it hath more to do with meditation than with explanation; it hath more to do with contemplation and adoration than with public service. We must look more to the state of the internal matters, keeping up private prayer, and attending to the reading of the Scriptures. If we do not, however much we may seem to progress outwardly, we are not any richer; we are only beating out the little gold we had into a thinner plate, and spreading it over a wider surface. The more we do for Christ, the more he will do for us; but let us take heed that, whilst we water other people's vineyards, our own is not neglected, and that the stones of the hedges thereof are not cast down. May God grant you, brethren, to grow in grace!

II. Now we come to the second thought, THAT GROWTH IN GRACE

IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED WITH GROWTH "IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST." In fact, there cannot be any grace at all except as we know Christ, and there can be no growth in grace except as we grow in our knowledge of Christ. We may always test whether we are growing by this question,—Do I know more of Christ to-day than I did yesterday? Do I live nearer to Christ to-day than I did a little while ago? For increase in the knowledge of Christ is the evidence as well as the cause of true growth in grace. In order to prove this, I will mention one or two Christian virtues, and you will see that they must increase as we know more of Christ.

With regard to love, some of us say, "How little we love Christ!" Many of you sing,—

> "'Tis a point I long to know,
> Oft it causes anxious thought,—
> Do I love the Lord, or no?
> Am I his, or am I not?"

That is a very good hymn,—I find no fault with it;—but please do not sing it too often. Now and then, you are welcome to it, but get through it as quickly as you can. I would far rather hear you sing that grand hymn of Toplady's,—

> "A debtor to mercy alone,
> Of covenant mercy I sing;
> Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
> My person and offering to bring."

"Oh!" say you, "I long to grow in love. I want to know that I love Jesus. I want to feel my heart going out after him, and my soul knit to him." Well, the way to grow in love is to know more of Christ. The more you know of the Saviour, the better you must love him; the more you discover of his beauties, of his excellences, of his virtues, of his perfections, and of his glories, the more your soul will be drawn towards him. I tell you, who do not love Christ at all, that it is because you do not know him; for if you knew anything of him, you would love him in proportion to your knowledge. The more you know of my Master, the more you will love him. You have only lifted one corner of the veil that shrouds his forehead, you have seen but one portion of his visage, so you love him; but if you had faith to lift the veil entirely, to see all of his blessed countenance, to mark the majestic sweetness which sits enthroned upon his lofty brow; if you could descant on his eyes, which are "like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim,"—if you could describe him as being "altogether lovely," ah! you would love him more. Blessed are the men that improve upon acquaintance! Jesus Christ is one of those blessed ones; the more you know of him, the more you love him. Sweet Jesus! when I first saw thee, I loved thee! When first thy wounded hand and bleeding side were uncovered to me, then I loved thee. Ah! but that love is nothing compared with what I have now. And, oh! when I shall see thee as thou art,—when my

soul becomes changed into love,—the love I have now shall seem to have been nought but a spark compared with that vehement flame of love which I shall have to thee then. Know more of Christ; read more of him; think more of him; ask about him more; because you will be sure to grow in the grace of love, in proportion as you know more of Christ.

So is it with regard to *faith*. What is the reason why so many of us groan because our faith is so feeble? It is because we do not know enough of Christ. There are many people who need to know a great deal more about Jesus than they know at present; and if they knew more about Jesus, they would have more faith. "Oh!" says one, "when I look at myself, I think, 'Oh, what is to become of me?' Then I search to see if there are not some evidences of grace." That is all wrong! You have no business to look there; you will not grow in faith by looking at yourself. One look at Jesus is worth fifty at yourself. If you would have more faith, keep your eye on Jesus. The wounds of Christ on Calvary are the mothers of faith; these are the breast from which faith must draw its nourishment. If you would grow in faith, you must live near to the cross. The sweet flower of faith was first sown in Christ's precious blood, and it must be watered by it every day. Know more of Christ; think more of him; and your faith will increase. Your little faith would soon get strong if you lived more on Jesus. If you would become Great-hearts by-and-by, and knock those giants about as terribly as Mr. Great-heart did of old, live near to Jesus; live with Jesus; feast at his banqueting table; for there is no food so strengthening to the spirit as the flesh of your Lord, and no wine can so invigorate your soul as the blood of Jesus Christ your Saviour.

So is it with regard to our *courage;* for that is a Christian grace, and one in which many are terribly deficient. Our Christian courage will always increase in proportion as we know Christ. We have far too many timid Christians who have not courage enough, I was about to say, to speak to a cheese-mite; they would not be able to profess the name of Christ before the smallest creature in the world; they would be almost ashamed to declare that they loved the Saviour even within bare walls, for fear some bird of the air should hear them, and go and tell the tale. They are so ashamed of their own faith (and yet it is real faith) that they scarcely dare to speak. The smallest stone in the road would make them stumble; a straw would be almost as great to them as a range of mountains like the Himalayas would be to others; they would be entirely cast out of the road if they had the least prospect that there could be a shadow in it for them to pass by. It is because we do not know enough of Christ that we are afraid of anything. I believe that, when we come truly to know Christ, we shall be afraid of nothing at all. Shall we be afraid of man? Nay; we shall say, "Whether it is right to obey God rather than man, judge ye." Shall we be afraid of the devil when we know Christ? Nay; we shall say, "Christ hath the devil chained, and he can always pull the dog of hell in when he attempts to bite us. Christ

hath hold of the dragon, and he cannot inflict deeper wounds than Christ willeth." We shall not be afraid of the messenger of death, for we shall regard him as an angel of the covenant sent to fetch God's people up to heaven. Courage will always be increased in proportion as we know more of Jesus; and if we could have Christ for our daily and hourly Companion, I believe all the hosts of hell, marshalled in battle, would no more affright us than would a flock of small birds that might settle upon our path, but we should say, "In the name of the Lord, we will destroy them." If you would have more true Christian courage, get more of "the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

So is it with regard to our *zeal*, which is a grace sadly lacking in these times. If we would be more zealous, we must live nearer to Christ. If the Son of man were to come now, would he find zeal upon the earth? His own question was, "Shall he find faith?" But would he find zeal? It would be difficult even for him to discover much of it amongst Christians. There is sound orthodoxy, but no zeal; there is heterodoxy, but still no zeal. Where do you find it? Just here and there. There is a remnant, according to the election of grace, who are zealous for God; but, in these times, we are sorry to say it, religion has degenerated into a kind of formality. It is a fashionable thing to be pious. We have been going on in the same track as other people; there was an old cart-rut, and we all drive along it. We have kept on at the same pace as our fathers; but, oh! if we knew more of Christ, we should have more zeal.

I cannot think it possible for men to lack zeal when they know Christ. They would then say, "Did my Saviour shed his blood for me, and shall I fear even to die for him? Did he come all the way from heaven to earth to save souls, and shall not I also seek to win them for him?" Should we have so many lazy preachers if they had more of Christ in their hearts? If they understood more of Jesus, should we have so many slothful, sluggish members in our churches, with so many who can make any excuse rather than labour for Christ, patching up any empty apology for idleness? No; brethren, if we knew more of the Saviour, if we had more frequent visions of him, if we saw him oftener on his cross, and viewed him more frequently sitting with the crown upon his head, we should say, "I vow revenge against my sloth; all I can do will be too little for so good a Lord.

"'All that I am, and all I have,
Shall be for ever thine;
Whate'er my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign.

"'Yet if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I should give him all.'"

It is no use to try to get more zeal except in the right way, knowing more of Christ; and if we seek to grow in zeal as certain

people we might mention have done, we shall have a zeal like a house on fire; it will do more mischief than it will do good. There may be some heat, and a deal of illumination; but it will die away, by-and-by, into black ashes, poisoning the churches everywhere. I have seen a certain kind of revival in England, and I can always tell where such "revivals" have been by the scarred state of the places after them. These so-called "revivals" have been wrought by excitable meetings, held by sundry preachers, who have invented strange doctrines, but have said nothing about the grace of God. They have for a time stirred up the people to a kind of religious *furor*, and they have left behind them a very desert. Before them it was like a garden of the Lord, but behind them barrenness and desolation. The church has been divided; there has been a reaction, and the people have sunk into the most lamentable condition. If we would have true zeal, it must be by the preaching of the good old doctrine, proclaiming Jesus Christ and him crucified; for anything else comes of the devil, and to hell it shall tend; its issue shall be destruction, and not salvation. But if we keep to the truth of God, there will be "revival" enough. We want nothing but the good old-fashioned gospel to stir the world again. Though men have tried new schemes, God will not own them. All these heresies must be swept away, and the true gospel—distinguishing grace of God in all the sovereignty of election—must yet again be preached; and when it is preached in all its fulness, then shall the church be zealous, and then shall Zion arise, and shake herself from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments.

Further, if we would grow also in *the grace of brotherly kindness*, we must know more of Christ. O beloved, we must lament that there is too little brotherly kindness in the world! There is a great deal of that mawkish, mistaken kindness which says, "We must never say anything contrary to anybody else's opinion. If we know of a doctrinal error, we must not expose it, because love of our brethren implies that, even if they are wrong, we would not tell them of it." But I think true brotherly kindness is always to preach the truth, and tell our brethren where they are wrong, and give them the opportunity of getting set right; to preach whatever we believe to be true, and to maintain what God has taught us; and then, after all, to say, "Well, brother, you differ from me. I am not infallible; I still love you." But that is no love which makes us hide the truth. True love will make us honest, zealous, and affectionate.

Why don't we love one another as much as we ought? It is because we do not love the Saviour enough, and we have not seen enough of him. If we had known more of the Saviour, I am sure we should love him better. I met with a strange idea when reading a book by old Burroughs, the other day. He says, "If Jesus Christ were to come down to his church now, he would see some of his children with black eyes; some others would be seen scratched in the face, and some bruised all over. He would say to them, 'What have you been doing?' If one should answer, 'Lord, I have been fighting with my brother, and he did this;' the Lord would say, 'Children

of one family fight! the birds of one nest disagree! how sad it is!'" It is a queer thought, but it may be a profitable one; for if our Lord Jesus Christ finds his people quarrelling, what will he say? You may remember a story I have told you before. An old Scotch elder had been disputing with his minister at an elders' meeting. He said some hard things, and almost broke the minister's heart. Afterwards, he went home, and the minister went home too. The next morning, when the elder came down, his wife said to him, "Eh, Jan! ye look very sad this morning; what's the matter wi' ye?" "Ah!" said he, "you would be sad too if you had had such a dream as I've had." "Weel, and what did ye dream about?" "Oh! I dreamed I had been at an elders' meeting, and I said some hard things, and grieved the minister; and as he went hame, I thought he died, and went to heaven. A fortnight after, I thought I died, and that I went to heaven, too; and when I got to the gates of heaven, out came the minister, and put out his hand to welcome me, saying, 'Come alang, Jan, there's nae strife up here, and I'm happy to see ye.'" The elder went to the minister to beg his pardon, but he found that he was dead; and he laid it so to heart that, within a fortnight, the elder himself departed; and I should not wonder if he did meet the minister at heaven's gate, and hear him say, "Come alang, Jan, there's nae strife up here." It will be well for us to recollect that there is no strife up there. Glorified saints have no strife among themselves; and we should love one another more in brotherly kindness if we thought more of heaven, and more of our blessed Jesus.

Lastly, there is another grace in which we need to grow; that is, *the grace of humility*. I am sure we should increase in that grace if we lived nearer to Christ. O humility, most precious thing, thou art most rare! He who talks most of it hath least of it. He who preaches of it best full often is least the subject of its power. O humility! I have sometimes thought that thou wert a phantom, and that pride was the reality. Humility, where art thou? The depths of poverty say, "Thou art not in me," for the poor are often proud. The heights of riches say, "Thou art not here," for the rich are often proud, too. O humility! Thou art not to be found in science, for philosophy puffeth up. Thou art not to be found in ignorance, for that is the mother of pride. O humility, where can I find thee? Where art thou? Nowhere can I see thee, or know what thou art, except I sit at the feet of Jesus, and behold myself a lost, ruined sinner purchased by divine love. If you, dear friend, would be truly humble, you must look at your Saviour, for then you will say,—

> "Alas! and did my Saviour bleed?
> And did my Sovereign die?
> Would he devote that sacred head
> For such a worm as I?"

You will never feel yourself such a worm as when, by faith, you see your Saviour dying for you; you will never know your own nothingness so well as when you see your Saviour's greatness. When you

grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you will be sure to grow in humility. Growing Christians think themselves nothing, but full-grown Christians think themselves less than nothing; and the nearer we get to Jesus, the smaller self will appear to be. Self and Christ can never come close together. When I stand near self, Christ is small; when I stand near Christ, self is small. May God grant to you, dear friends, to grow in the knowledge of Christ! Read the Scriptures more. Seek more the influences of the Holy Spirit upon them; spend more time in devotion; ask God the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh sight of Calvary; be oftener on the mount of transfiguration, in the garden of suffering, in the hall of agony, under the cross of crucifixion; live with Jesus, and near to him; and so, changed from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord, you shall each one of you grow unto the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus.

The following notices appear in *The Sword and the Trowel* for November, 1900:—

Spurgeon's Illustrated Almanack for 1901, and *John Ploughman's Sheet Almanack for* 1901, price one penny each, are almost ready for publication, and may be ordered at once of all booksellers and colporteurs, or of Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, 4, Paternoster Buildings, London.

It will be a pleasant surprise to many of our friends to find that Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon, notwithstanding the very serious illness from which she has been suffering all through the year, has been able to select the texts for daily reading during 1901, and also to write her annual letter to readers of the Book Almanack. The new issue contains rather more than the average number of illustrated articles by the ever-beloved C. H. Spurgeon. The abundant stores of good material, left by him as a precious legacy to the Church and the world, appear to be practically inexhaustible. The other contributions in the little book will, we trust, make it as acceptable as its many predecessors have been.

The Sheet Almanack is once more very largely compiled from the proverbs, and proverbial and pithy sayings, composed or selected by "John Ploughman." The central illustration is a large and clear reproduction of the flashlight photograph taken in the new Metropolitan Tabernacle on the night of Mr. Sankey's "Service of Song and Story." This fact alone should make the present broadsheet widely popular, for it is an interesting souvenir of a very memorable occasion. At the four corners of the sheet are pictures of the kind that "John Ploughman" used to provide for his many thousands of readers, with brief descriptive articles concerning them.

A notable volume, about to be published by Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, is entitled *An All-round Ministry. Addresses to Ministers and Students.* By C. H. SPURGEON. It is uniform in style with "*Till He Come*," and *The Soul-Winner;* and though it contains 44 pages more than either of these works, it is issued at the same price,—3s. 6d. It comprises twelve of the Presidential Addresses delivered at the Annual Conferences of the Pastors' College in various years from 1872 to 1890. Their publication in this form carries out a purpose which was in Mr. Spurgeon's mind many years ago. Though specially addressed to ministers and students, they are adapted to all Christian workers, and will help them to exercise that "all-round ministry" of which Mr. Spurgeon himself was so earnest an advocate, and so bright an example.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

JESUS JOYFULLY RECEIVED.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 18TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 16th, 1881.

"He . . . . received him joyfully."—Luke xix. 6.

THIS morning,* I showed you, dear friends, how joyfully Jesus receives sinners,—how he welcomes them,—how glad he is to find those whom he came to seek and to save. From this text, it appears that, when sinners receive Jesus, they receive him joyfully, so that there is joy on both sides. It is a joyful business altogether; the Saviour is glad to save, and the sinner is glad to be saved. I know which of the two has the greater joy, for it is always more blessed to give than to receive; and the great heart of Jesus, in its infinite benevolence, is conscious of a rarer joy than even the saved sinner can experience. It is a delight to him to save; so great is his joy that he cannot contain it all within his own heart, and he represents himself as calling together his friends and neighbours, and saying to them, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." But when the two seas meet,—the sea of the saved one's gladness and the sea of the Saviour's joy,—what blessed floods they make! How the dancing waves clap their hands with delight! Surely, joy on earth becomes then more than on any other occasion parallel with the joy in heaven. Such joy before the Lord is "according to the joy in harvest;" and such days are "as the days of heaven upon the earth." How earnestly, then, you and I ought to seek to bring men to Christ! This is the best method of making joy in this sin-cursed world. This is the surest way of plucking up the thorns and the thistles that sin has sown, and of making the myrtle and the rose to grow instead thereof, according to that ancient promise: "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands;"—even before you who are the means of reconciling men to their Maker, and of bringing sinners to their Saviour.

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,624, "Welcome! Welcome!"

This joyous time of receiving Christ is the turning-point in character, and it is also one of the tests of destiny. By this sign shall you discern between the men predestinated unto eternal life and those who have no share in the divine decree. He that receiveth Christ thereby proves that he is Christ's; but he that receiveth him not shall surely perish as the result of his wilful rejection of the Saviour. The gospel is, after all, the great fan that winnows the chaff from the wheat; it separates the precious from the vile, even as Christ said to the Jews, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." Whether or no you will receive Christ when he comes your way, is the all-important matter for each one of you to decide. If your door be shut when he is passing by, he may never come your way again. But if, when he bids you come to him, as he bade Zacchæus make haste, and come down, you receive him with alacrity, opening the door of your heart that he may enter in, then shall you prove that you are his, that you are among those who are the blessed of the Lord, and who shall be blessed world without end. So this matter of the reception of Christ is, as I called it just now, all-important; and I want to press it upon each unsaved person here with the urgent desire and the confident hope that some, like Zacchæus, will receive Christ joyfully.

This passage also teaches us that, often, the most unlikely persons are the first to receive the Saviour. I should have said, and you would all have agreed with me, that the least likely person in the city of Jericho to receive Christ into his house was this rich little tax-gatherer Zacchæus,—this man whom all the people disliked so much that, when Christ went to his house, "they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." Yet he was the one person in that place who did entertain the Lord Jesus Christ; and many a time since has Christ been shut out of good men's doors, or the doors of those who have reckoned themselves as good men; but he has found shelter within the gates of sinners, and such sinners as have been reputed among men to be utterly given over and hopeless. I would not pick my congregation even if I might do so; I would much rather that they should come, as they do come, by God's choice and constraint; for the man whom I might think most likely to be blessed would probably pass the blessing by; and he whom we, in our poor, feeble judgment, might expect to be the last to receive the Saviour, might turn out to be the first, the most willing, and the most joyful receiver of him. I cannot tell, therefore, who among you will take the Saviour in; I wish I could hope that all, who have not yet done so, would do it ere the sermon ends. He is such a wondrous Guest that you may all entertain him at the same moment; and he can come to each one's heart, he may be the Guest of everyone who is a sinner, and yet each sinner who receives him shall find that a whole Christ has come into his heart.

Let me also add that, sometimes, very strange motives may bring people where they will be led to receive the Saviour. I need not allude to Zacchæus climbing the sycomore tree, or only just allude to it in passing; but many a person has come into the house of God,

out of the idlest curiosity, or to oblige a friend, or to while away an hour. Rowland Hill used to say that there were some people who made a cloak of religion; and when they ran into Surrey Chapel, on a wet day, to shelter from the rain, he used to add, "and there are some who make an umbrella of it." It is just so still; people are influenced by all sorts of motives; harmless motives, vain motives, foolish motives, even condemnable motives have brought persons where Jesus Christ has been passing by; and so have been the occasion of Christ's entering into hearts which else had been closed to him. It may be so with some of you who are here; perhaps you hardly expected to be here, and you scarcely know why you came. Yet it was written in the book of destiny that, this night, you should either accept Christ as your Saviour, or you should be wilfully guilty of shutting the door of your heart in his face. God grant that it may not be that latter action; but may you say to him, "Come in, blessed Saviour. Let salvation come, in thy person, to my house and heart, this very hour; then will I rejoice whilst thou shalt rejoice also."

Thus have I introduced to you the text: "He received him joyfully." Now I want to say to you, with regard to the reception of the Saviour, that he is not here corporeally, physically, for he has gone back again into his glory, to sit at the right hand of the Father; but he is here spiritually according to his promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He enters freely into men's hearts, but he cannot now be received corporeally into your houses, nor can he sit at your tables, and partake of your feasts; but he can, by his Spirit, enter into your hearts; and he can spiritually dwell there, and make a temple of your bodies, and reign there, finding a happy abode within your renewed nature.

I. Now, if you would receive him, I wish to call your attention, first, to the fact that, in order to salvation, THERE MUST BE A PERSONAL RECEPTION OF A PERSONAL CHRIST: "He received him joyfully." There you have two persons both present. "He"—that is, Zacchæus—"received him"—that is, Christ—"joyfully." That looks very simple, yet there is a great depth of truth in it, as I will try to show you.

For, first, *there are some persons, who suppose that, in order to be saved, they are to receive a creed.* That is quite true; you are to have a creed, and I urge you to take heed what you believe. Go to the law and to the testimony, and believe nothing but what is in the Word of God. But I pray you also to recollect that a man may receive the soundest creed in Christendom, and yet be damned. He may believe, as a matter of head-knowledge, all that should be believed; and yet, for all that, he may not believe anything with his heart, and so may perish. I believe that the devil is orthodox. In all that he says, he usually seems to propound either the truth or something which shows that he knows what the truth is; yet, though, in that sense, he believes, and even goes as far as trembling, the devil is not changed in heart, nor will he be saved by what he believes. It is not receiving a creed which saves you; it is receiving a Person into your heart's love. It is not written in

our text, "he received *it*;" but, "he received him." Mark that: "he received *him* joyfully."

Again, *salvation comes not through receiving an ordinance, or ordinances, however correct or Scriptural they may be.* It is not said, "Zacchæus received baptism;" or, "Zacchæus received the communion." I do not doubt that Zacchæus did receive both ordinances; but it was not said to him, "This day is salvation come to thy house because thou hast received the sacraments." No; salvation came to him when he received Christ, when that blessed and Divine Person crossed the threshold of his heart, and was welcomed as he installed himself in the affections of the rich tax-gatherer. It was then that he was saved; and, beloved, if you are to be saved, Christ must come in a similar fashion into your understandings and your hearts. Salvation comes, not through ordinances, however Scripturally and correctly they may be observed; it is Christ, and Christ alone, who can save your soul. It must be with you as it was with Zacchæus when "he received him joyfully."

Furthermore, *it was not even the doctrine of Christ* that Zacchæus on this occasion received, though he did receive the doctrine of Christ, and learnt of Christ, and became his disciple; but, first, he received Christ; and, then, he received Christianity. Beware, I pray you, of being like many nominal Christians who know not Christ. Beware of that Christianity from which Christ has been eliminated. You must first receive the Master, or else it is idle to be associated with his servants. You may say that you belong to his Church; but if you are not joined to the Head, what will it avail you to claim to be in the body? If you are not vitally united to the Lord so as to become one spirit with him, of what service will it be to you that you are reckoned among his followers, and that your names are written on an earthly church-roll? Zacchæus received Christ himself, and this is the all-important saving matter: "he received him."

How did he receive him? *He received Christ as his Guest, and entertained him.* Will you so receive Christ,—giving him your heart, your love, yourself,—letting him come and find meat and drink for his love within your soul? I beg you to admit him thus. Behold, he stands at the door of your heart, and knocks; again, and again, and again, with gentle hand knocking at the door, does he seek an entrance. Oh, open your heart to him, and let him be your Guest this very hour!

But, further, *Zacchæus received Christ as his Lord.* Notice what he said: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." That is the way in which you also must receive Christ as your Master and Lord.

In so doing, *Zacchæus also admitted Christ as his Saviour*, for Jesus said, "This day is salvation come to this house." You will think it strange, but I have known some who have called Jesus "Lord," who have not owned him as their Saviour. Thank God, it is changed with them now; but I did know some, who came to this house, who honoured and worshipped Christ according to the

light they had, yet they did not understand their need of him, nor did they accept him as their Saviour. As I said, just now, this has all been changed with them; and so must it be with any of you who would truly receive Christ. If you do not accept him in his character as Saviour, you virtually reject him altogether, since he can never be separated from the merit of his blood, and the love of his heart towards guilty sinners. What! Would you have an unwounded Christ,—an unbleeding Christ,—a Christ that never died for men? There is no such Christ as that except in fiction; the Christ of reality "is come to seek and to save that which was lost;" and in that character he must be received by us also if he is received at all.

II. Now I pass on to notice that THE RECEPTION OF CHRIST, TO BE REAL, MUST IN EVERY CASE BE VOLUNTARY. Willingly, Zacchæus "made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." That joyful reception of Christ shows the willingness of Zacchæus; it proves how cheerfully, how gladly, how willingly,—the words all carry the same sense,—how joyfully, with the full freedom of his will, he received the Saviour.

Observe that *the call of grace does not hinder this willing reception.* There was a previous call of grace: "Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house;" but, although that call was graciously powerful, and, in a gospel sense, irresistible, yet it did not interfere with the free agency of Zacchæus so as to make him unwillingly receive the Saviour. No; he cheerfully, joyfully, received Christ as the result of that call. Here is where many people make a great mistake. They fancy that we, who preach effectual calling, make out that men are like logs of wood or carved images,—dead things that are dragged or drawn about without any reference to their own will. We teach nothing of the kind. We preach that men are intelligent, responsible agents, and that the omnipotent grace of God in which we firmly believe, and our belief in which we are never ashamed to declare, nevertheless exerts itself in a way and manner suitable to the free agency of these human beings, so that grace gets the victory; but, at the same time, a man acts as a man. Zacchæus is not dragged down from the tree by an angel who lays hold of the nape of his neck, and throws him down against his will; and the door of his house does not open by magic; but the man comes down from the tree, in the ordinary way, by the exercise of his own will and power, and he opens the door of his home for Christ to enter; yet, secretly, in his heart there was a power other than his own which was moving him to act as he did. This may not be easy to understand, or to explain in words; but it is easy enough in actual life. It is plainly seen in the lives of those who are converted to Christ. Nobody will say that Zacchæus did not as freely let Christ into his house as ever he had performed any action in his life. In fact, he never had put so much heart into anything he had ever done as he did into that act of receiving Christ. "He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." He was glad to do it, he cheerfully yielded obedience to the divine command.

And, dear friends, you and I must receive Christ cheerfully, willingly, voluntarily, *or else we have not really received him at all.* Christ will not force himself into any man's house, and sit there against the man's will. That would not be the action of a guest, but of an unwelcome intruder. Christ will not come in, as it were, mailed and armed, forcibly to take possession of any man's soul; but what he does is gently to change the bias of our will so that we willingly invite him to enter our heart. We constrain him to come in, and to dwell with us; we say to him, "Abide with us;" and not only are we willing to have Christ, but we are anxious and desirous to have him. To get him, we would, if necessary, sell all that we have. To keep him, we would lay down our very lives; for that which once seemed undesirable to us, is now the height of our ambition, the very core and centre of our highest desire. "He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." His whole heart went with his reception of Christ.

What say you, dear friend? Will you now receive Christ joyfully? Will you willingly receive him? I know you will if you truly feel your need of him, and if you realize how exactly he meets that need. I know you will gladly receive him if you understand what blessings come in his train,—what wealth of happiness and joy he gives to the heart in which he condescends to dwell. You will say to him, "My Lord, now do I repent most sorrowfully that ever I resisted thee; and, made willing in the day of thy power, I fling open the doors of my heart, and cry, 'Come in; come in; come in; dwell with me henceforth, and go no more out for ever.'"

After Christ has been received into the heart, *everything else will have to be done cheerfully and voluntarily.* He did not command Zacchæus to give the half of his goods to the poor; but, spontaneously, as soon as Christ came in, Zacchæus said, of his own accord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." No ordinance to this effect had proceeded from the Saviour's lips: "Zacchæus, you must restore fourfold to all whom you have wronged." No; but gladly, out of the fulness of his renewed heart, he freely said, "If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." This is the very essence of true religion; it is cheerful voluntariness. When a man, who professes to be a Christian, begins to ask, "Must I do this?" or "Must I do that?" he makes us stand in doubt concerning him. Believers in Christ are not under the law, but under grace. The principle that rules us is not "Must I?" but "May I?" It becomes to the believer a joy and a delight to serve Christ; he is not flogged to his duty. The slave-driver's whip and the stocks are not for the freeborn citizens of the New Jerusalem. These things are for men of the world, who will do nothing unless they are paid for it, one way or the other. The dread of hell, or the hope of heaven;—these are the only motives that they recognize; but those who receive Christ dread no hell, for they know that they can never go there. "He that believeth on him is not condemned." Such a man works not to obtain heaven; why should he? Heaven

is his already; in Christ Jesus, it is given to him by a covenant which cannot be broken. So now he sings,—

"Loved of my God, for him again
With love intense I burn:
Chosen of thee ere time began,
I choose thee in return."

And this blessed voluntariness, this joyous freedom of the will, conferred by sovereign grace, becomes the very life and soul of vital godliness. Do you possess it, dear friend? If not, may God the Holy Spirit speedily give it to you! If you have it, may he nurture it, and make it to increase within you; and so, like Zacchæus, whatever you do, may you do it joyfully, cheerfully, as unto the Lord!

III. This brings me now to close with my third remark, which is, that THE RECEPTION WHICH WE GIVE TO CHRIST MAY WELL BE A JOYFUL ONE.

To receive Christ into the heart, dear brethren and sisters, ought not that to be as glad a thing as for a man to welcome his long-desired bride, or his firstborn child, or to receive his estate when he comes to the ripeness of manhood? Ay, more than that, ought it not to be as much joy to receive Christ as to receive heaven itself, for would there be any heaven possible if we had not first received Christ? Ring the bells of heaven, and ring them yet again, for a soul has received Christ Jesus the Lord. It is the gladdest event on earth, and it gives new joy even in heaven. See how the angels fly upward from their various watching-places to tell their brethren on yonder battlements, that they may publish it in every golden street, "Another sinner has received Christ. Joy, joy for ever!" These are the things that make jubilees in heaven; when sinners receive their Saviour, they make glad rejoicing before the face of the Highest himself.

If I hear that a certain person's reception of Christ had not much gladness in it, I am not necessarily led to suspect the reality of it, though I wish he had received Christ joyfully. When men receive the Word with gladness, if it is nothing but the bare Word, I can understand that they may be like the rocky ground which received the good seed; but, after a while, for lack of depth and moisture, the ground yielded not life enough or nourishment enough for the seed, so it withered away. But it is different when, instead of "it", you read "him": "he received *him* joyfully." That is another matter altogether; for, if Christ be received into the soul, he will not die. If Jesus be taken into the heart, he will not disappear, and go his way; but where he once comes, he abides for ever. So, let us have as much joy as ever we can connected with our conversion; and let us not, because of that gladness, question its genuineness; but let us rather be all the more sure that it is a true work of Christ's grace because, like Zacchæus, we have received Christ joyfully.

Think what joy there ought to be in the heart that receives Christ into it. First of all, *what an honour it is!* O poor lowly woman,

or humble man, will the Lord of glory really come and dwell in you? You are no queen, or prince, or philosopher; will the great Lord of all dwell in your frail body, which is undecorated by costly dress, perhaps unadorned by natural beauty? Has he indeed come down to dwell with you? Then, you are indeed honoured even above the angels, for we never read that Christ dwells in them. You ought to be indeed glad that the Lord has permitted you to receive such an honour as this.

Then, next, where Jesus comes into the heart, *he comes to put away all sin.* Wherever Jesus is received, all the guilt of the past is blotted out and gone, never to be remembered any more. When you receive Christ, you receive full remission of all your sin, every transgression goes into complete oblivion. Just think of that, and tell me if it is not a joyous thing to receive Christ. Will you not, then, like Zacchæus, receive Christ joyfully?

When you receive Christ, you also receive the fountain of inward purity, *the well-spring of cleansing which shall overflow unto ultimate perfection.* Receiving Christ, sin gets its death-warrant. Every buyer and seller in the temple of your nature will have to go. Everything received by false accusation will have to be given up. Where Jesus comes, the devil flies away, and angels come in with all their blessed train of beauty and holiness. To receive Christ, is to drive out hell, and to let in heaven; it is to end the darkness, and to begin the everlasting day. Then, shall we not receive him joyfully?

Let me come close to you, and whisper a little secret in your ear. Zacchæus did not know it, and the parallel does not hold good with his case, but it does with ours. There is great cause for joy in receiving Christ, *because he will never go away again.* When he once comes into our heart, he claims the freehold of it; and, by a divine entail, holds possession of it against all comers even to the end. I am not one of those who believe that a man can be a child of God to-day, and a child of the devil to-morrow. Ah, no! When Christ, the strong Man armed, does really take possession of the heart, a stronger than he must come if he is to be driven out; but there is no one stronger than he is. Hell itself can find no power to match the might of him who died to save his people from their sins; and you may depend upon it that he will fight for his own, and preserve his own, even until he comes to take them to be with him for ever. Therefore, be glad when Jesus comes into your heart, for it means salvation for you even unto the end.

And, further, *it also means eternal glory;* for he who thus comes into your heart is the same Saviour who prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Oh, yes! he will bring you safely home to glory. Admit him, and he will keep you here as his own until such a day as it shall please him, and then he will gently waft your soul away to the better land where, transformed, and rendered white as snow, he will still dwell in you, and walk in you, and you shall be his people, and he will be your

God. Oh, the bliss of admitting Christ into the heart and life! There is nothing like it under heaven; and even heaven itself can show nothing better than the joy of receiving Christ into one's inmost heart, for that is indeed heaven begun below.

So I will finish my discourse by begging all of you who are gathered together here, if you have never yet received Christ, to receive him now. Perhaps someone enquires, "How can we receive him?" Well, first, open the door which has hitherto been closed. Be willing that he should come into your heart, to rule your whole life. Next, stand at the door, and invite him to come in. By earnest prayer, entreat him to enter. Then, believe in him; that is really to receive him, as John says, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." So that believing on him is receiving him. It is trusting him. You know what it is to trust yourself wholly to the care of another. Just as you might, on some dark night, when you had lost your way on the moor, trust yourself entirely with a guide who knew the way, even so trust yourself with Christ to lead you to his Father, and he will do it. You have received him when you have trusted him. O dear hearts, do receive my Master! Blessed Spirit, lead them to do so, and to do so at once!

I admire Zacchæus very much for one thing in which he differed from a good many of you. You ask such a lot of questions, and when you get them answered, or if they are not answered, you ask so many more. If Zacchæus had been like you, I can imagine how he would have sat up in that sycomore tree, and when Christ called out to him, "Make haste, and come down," he would have said, "But, ——;" and Jesus would have listened, and heard what he had to say, and answered him. Then he would have said again, "But, Lord, ——;" and there he might have stuck up in that sycomore tree, but no blessing would have come to him. There are ever so many of you who have been, as it were, up a sycomore tree for years. You always want to know more than you ever will know. You seem to be very clever at picking holes in the gospel; you have wonderful skill in the art of trying how you can damn yourselves; and you will do it, one of these days, unless God should prevent you by his almighty grace. If you can, you even spoil the precious promises of Scripture; you lay hold of one of God's golden coins, and try to deface it. I mean, that you take his promise, and then seek to get the very life and soul out of it;—not that you may claim it for yourself, but in order to show that it does not belong to you. I never yet heard of a man going to law to prove that a fortune was not his. Men are eager enough to get temporal things; but when you come to spiritual things, there are thousands of people who seem only anxious to prove that they can never be saved. If I were in your place, I would let the devil do that kind of work if he liked, it is very much to his taste; but, as for you, do not have even a little finger in it. Look at Zacchæus. I can see him. As soon as ever Christ says to him, "Come down," why, dear me, the man is down before we can utter another word!

And soon he is at the door of his house, and saying to the Master, "Come in, Lord, come in! Heartily do I welcome you!" Now, then, go and do likewise; ask no more questions, but make haste, and come down, and receive Christ joyfully. "But I want to know this." You shall know it when you have received Christ. "But am I one of his elect?" I will answer your question as soon as you receive him. A good Wesleyan brother said to a Calvinistic friend down in Cornwall, "Now, Malachi, I owe you these two pounds; but, before I pass them over, you must tell me whether you are predestinated to have them." Malachi said, "Just put the two pounds here, in the middle of my hand, and I will tell you directly." That was very sensible on the part of Malachi; and I say to you,—Do not be asking about predestination or anything else, but just receive Christ; and when you have accepted him, you may rest assured that he has given you power to become a son of God. You have believed on his name, and therefore you are saved. That is the all-important point. So, like Zacchæus, make haste, and come down, and receive Christ joyfully. The Lord grant that you may do it; and unto his name shall be the praise for ever and ever! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE XIX. 1—27.

Verses 1, 2. *And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchæus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.*

Many of those tax-gatherers were rich; they usually farmed the taxes, and took care to extort all that they possibly could out of the poverty of the people.

3. *And he sought to see Jesus who he was;*

He did not seek to hear him; his curiosity lay in another direction,—he desired to see him. Who could this man be who created such a stir? What kind of man was he?

3—5. *And could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him,—*

Zacchæus went up into the sycomore tree that he might see Jesus, but he was himself seen there by Jesus; and that, dear friends, is the first act in the process of salvation. Jesus looks at us, and then we look at him. So, here, the Lord spied out Zacchæus up among the branches of the tree; "he looked up, and saw him,"—

5. *And said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.*

His surprise at receiving such a message must have been overwhelming, yet he did not suffer that surprise to delay his obedience to Christ's command.

6, 7. *And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.*

"This professedly superior teacher, this purist, this teacher of the highest

morality, has gone to be guest with this taxgatherer,—a man who is a sort of outlaw, a disreputable person altogether." Ah! how does the legal spirit, in self-righteous men, cry out against the sweet benevolence of our blessed Master, who comes into the world for this very purpose,—to be the Guest of sinners, that he may be the Physician of sinners!

8. *And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;*

There was not one among those self-righteous people who would have done a tenth as much as Zacchæus declared that he would do.

8. *And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

There was not one among the murmurers who would have dared to say as much as that. There are a great many people who are quick to condemn those who are a hundred times better than themselves. I wonder whether there are any people of that sort here; I should not wonder if there are.

9. *And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*

When our Lord was here, his personal mission as a soul-winner was to the Jews, to those who were of the house of Abraham; so he shows that however much despised this man might be, he came within the compass of the Christ's immediate mission: "forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

10, 11. *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*

Some of them dreamt of a temporal sovereignty with Christ at its head, so he taught them that his kingdom was something very different from that.

12, 13. *He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.*

"Use these pounds on my account; be stewards of them for me until I return."

14—16. *But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.*

He was a modest man; he did not say, "I have gained ten pounds;" but, "Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." And if God has blessed anyone so as to enable him to bring in a large result from the talent entrusted to him, he must ascribe it all to God, and not to himself: "Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds."

17—19. *And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.*

Observe that, whatever the triumph of Christ is to be, his faithful servants are to share in it. He is to be the King of the many cities in the rich provinces of his Father's domain; but he will give to one of his servants ten cities, and to another five cities. But what a vast dominion that must be out of which he can afford to give such rewards as this! Ten cities,—can any earthly king give in this fashion? There are royal rewards at the

last for those who are faithful now. No pitiful pence shall fall to the lot of those who diligently serve the Lord Christ; they shall have a rich reward, not of debt, but of grace; and, therefore, all the larger.

20. *And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:*

He had not lost it, he had not spent it, he had not even dug a hole in the earth and hidden it; but he had used a nice piece of linen to wrap it in, and had taken great care of it; and there it was just as when he received it. It had not diminished, neither had it grown at all.

21. *For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.*

So there is a slavish kind of fear, a dread, a horror of God, which will even keep men out of his service. It ought not legitimately to do so; but, undoubtedly, there are some persons who, out of an evil timidity, are afraid to attempt anything for God or man, and hence their life is useless. Their talent cankers and rusts in the napkin in which they have wrapped it.

22. *And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man,—*

"That was thine opinion; according to thine own confession, that was thine idea concerning me: 'Thou knewest that I was an austere man,'"—

22, 23. *Taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?*

"With proper interest." God does not trouble about clearing his character with ungodly men. You and I are very particular and punctilious in defending ourselves against false accusations; but God's character needs no clearing. It is so transparent that, if ungodly men choose to besmear it, he argues with them on their own ground, and does not stay to answer their slanders. When I have heard people say of God that he is unjust or too severe, all I have felt inclined to say in reply was just this, "Whatever he may be, he is the God who will judge you at the last; and if you think thus of him, so much the more ought you to yield yourself to him, and submit to his infinite majesty, for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is an ill day when we attempt to be the judge of our Judge, and pretend to be the god of God. He is infinitely glorious, so let us bow before him."

24—26. *And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, that unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.*

They who have some already shall have more, especially in the matter of grace. If you serve God well, he will give you more to do. If you love him ardently, he will reward you by enabling you to have more love to him; and if you exercise great faith, he will give you yet more faith. The way to be truly enriched, spiritually, is to be faithful to God in what we have.

27. *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.*

Whatever these words mean, it is certain that there is a terrible doom in store for all who are God's enemies. May none of us be found among them!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—408, 537.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"MARVELLOUS LOVINGKINDNESS."

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 25TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, October 20th, 1881.

"Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness."—Psalm xvii. 7.

THE Lord's people, in the time of their trouble, know where to go for comfort and relief. Being taught of God, they do not hew out to themselves broken cisterns, which can hold no water; but they turn to the ever-flowing fountain, they go to the well-head,—even to God himself; and there they cast themselves down, and drink to the full. David, when he wrote this Psalm, was evidently in very great distress; and, therefore, he says, "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech." What he wanted was his God; as Dr. Watts expresses it,—

> "In darkest shades if he appear,
> My dawning is begun;
> He is my soul's sweet morning star,
> And he my rising sun."

Believers draw comfort both from God's ordinary and extraordinary dealings with them, for they regard God's lovingkindness as being both an ordinary and an extraordinary thing. I have heard of a good sister who, when a friend narrated to her some very gracious dealing of God, was asked the question, "Is it not very wonderful?" and she replied, "No; it is not wonderful, for it is just like him." Begging her pardon, and admitting the great truth that she meant to convey, I think it is still more wonderful that it should be "just like him." The wonder of extraordinary love is that God should make it such an ordinary thing, that he should give to us "marvellous lovingkindness," and yet should give it so often that it becomes a daily blessing, and yet remains marvellous still. The marvels of men, after you have seen them a few times, cease to excite any wonder. I suppose there is scarcely a building, however costly its materials, and however rare its architecture, as to

which, sooner or later, you will not feel that you have seen enough of it. But God's wonderful works never pall upon you. You could gaze upon Mont Blanc, or you could stand and watch Niagara, yet never feel that you had exhausted all its marvels. And everyone knows how the ocean is never twice alike. They who live close to it, and look upon it every hour of the day, still see God's wonders in the deep.

That God should bless us every day, is a theme for our comfort. God's ordinary ways charm us. The verse before our text says, "'I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God.' I know thou wilt, for the blessing that I am about to ask from thee is a thing that I have been accustomed to receive from thee. I know thou wilt hear me, for thou hast heard me in the past; it is a habit of thine to listen to my supplications, and to grant my requests." I hope we can argue in a similar fashion; yet, at the same time, God's people draw equal comfort from the extraordinary character of the mercies he bestows upon them. They appeal to him to show them his "marvellous lovingkindness," to let them see the wonderful side of it as well as the common side of it, to let them behold his miracles of mercy, his extravagances of love, his superfluities of kindness;—I scarcely know what words to use when talking of what the apostle Paul calls "the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence," "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

I want, on this occasion, to dwell upon the extraordinary side of God's lovingkindness; and, using our text as a prayer, to say to the Lord in the language of David, "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness." Sometimes, a man is brought into such a condition that he feels that, if God does not do something quite out of the common order of things, he will assuredly perish. He has now come to such a pass that, if some extraordinary grace is not displayed towards him, all is over with him. Well, now, such a brother may think that God will not give this extraordinary grace to him; he may be troubled at the idea that some marvellous thing is needed. It is to meet that suggestion of unbelief that I am going to address you now.

I. And my first remark is, that ALL THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF GOD IS MARVELLOUS.

The least mercy from God is a miracle. That God does not crush our sinful race, is a surprising mercy. That you and I should have been spared to live,—even though it were only to exist in direst poverty, or in sorest sickness,—that we should have been spared at all, after what we have been, and after what we have done, is a very marvellous thing. The explanation of the marvel is given in the Book of Malachi: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." If God had possessed such a short temper as men often have, he would have made short work with us all; but he is gracious and longsuffering, and therefore he is very patient with us. The very least mercy that we ever receive from God is a very wonderful thing; but when we think of

all that is meant by this blessed word "lovingkindness"—, which is a compound of all sorts of sweetnesses, a mixture of fragrances to make up one absolutely perfect perfume,—when we take that word "lovingkindness", and think over its meaning, we shall see that it is a marvellous thing indeed that it describes.

For, first, it is *marvellous for its antiquity*. To think that God should have had lovingkindness towards men or ever the earth was, that there should have been a covenant of election,—a plan of redemption,—a scheme of atonement,—that there should have been eternal thoughts of love in the mind of God towards such a strange being as man, is indeed marvellous. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Read these words now with the tears in your eyes: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee;" and when you know that this passage refers to you, tell me if it is not "marvellous lovingkindness." God's mind is occupied with thoughts concerning things that are infinitely greater than the destiny of any one of us, or of all of us put together; yet he was pleased to think of us in love from all eternity, and to write our names upon his hands and upon his heart, and to keep the remembrance of us perpetually before him, for his "delights were with the sons of men." This antiquity makes it to be indeed "marvellous lovingkindness."

Next, think of *its discriminating character*, that God's lovingkindness should have come to the poorest, to the most illiterate, the most obscure, and often to the most guilty of our race. Remember what Paul wrote about this matter: "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." Dr. Watts expresses the same thought in his verses,—

"When the Eternal bows the skies
To visit earthly things,
With scorn divine he turns his eyes
From towers of haughty kings.

"He bids his awful chariot roll
Far downward from the skies,
To visit every humble soul,
With pleasure in his eyes."

God's choice is marvellous. I know of no better word to apply to his lovingkindness to his chosen than that which is applied in the text: "thy marvellous lovingkindness."

"What was there in you that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father,' you ever must sing,
'Because it seem'd good in thy sight.'"

There is no other explanation of this wondrous mercy, this "marvellous lovingkindness," than the poet gives,—

> "His love, from eternity fix'd upon you,
> Broke forth, and discover'd its flame,
> When each with the cords of his kindness he drew,
> And brought you to love his great name."

So, beloved, think over the antiquity of God's lovingkindness, and then of the discriminating character of it, and surely you will be full of adoring wonder.

After that, think also of *the self-sacrificing nature of his lovingkindness*,—that, when God had set his heart on man, and had chosen his people before the foundation of the world, then he should give—what? Himself. Ay, nothing short of that;—that he should not only give us this world, and his providence, and all its blessings, and the world to come, and all its glories; but that, in order to our possession of these things, he should give his own Son to die for us. Well might the apostle John write, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." It was not that Christ died for us when we were righteous, "for scarcely for a righteous man will one die:" "but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Isaiah had long before explained the mystery: "It pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief." You who love your children, to lose one of whom would be worse than to die, can realize a little of what must have been the Father's love to you in giving up his only-begotten Son that you might live through him. Dwell on this great truth, dear friends, meditate on it, and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into its heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, for these lips cannot fully speak of its wonders. As you think over the Lord's ancient lovingkindnesses which were ever of old, his distinguishing love towards his redeemed, and his self-sacrificing love in giving up his Only-begotten, you will be obliged to say, "It is marvellous lovingkindness; it is marvellous lovingkindness indeed."

Then go on to think of *the marvellous constancy of it*. That one should begin to love another, is not so very wonderful; but that love, after it has been despised and ill-requited, should still continue,—that the sweet love of Christ should not long ago have curdled into jealousy, and from jealousy have soured into indignation, is an extraordinary thing. He loved us, brothers and sisters, when we did not even know him, and yet hated the Unknown; when we did not even dimly understand his love to us, and peradventure even ridiculed it, or at least neglected it. Yet he kept on loving us until he loved us into loving him. But even since then, what has been our character? Are you satisfied with what you have been towards the Well-beloved? Are you content with your conduct towards the Bridegroom of your souls? I trow that you are not; and yet, notwithstanding your lukewarmness, your backsliding, your dishonouring of his name, your unbelief, your

pride, your love of others, he still loves you; and even now, if you are not enjoying fellowship with him, he has not gone away from you, for his word still is, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." He loves, he loves on, and he loves still. Many waters cannot quench his love, neither can the floods drown it. It is indeed "marvellous lovingkindness." Can you think of a better adjective than that? I cannot, yet I am conscious that even it does not fully express the miraculous character of this all-enduring love which will not take our "No" for an answer, but still says, "Yes,—'yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.'" Oh, this wonderful, this matchless, this unparalleled, this inconceivable, this infinite love! No human language can adequately describe it, so let us sit still, and marvel at that which we cannot even understand.

There is much in God's lovingkindness to be marvelled at *in its strange ingenuity*. I might keep on with this topic for ever, applying one word and another to it; yet I should never have shown you even the tithe of its wonders, for it is an altogether inexhaustible theme. But it is wonderful how God deals with us with such a sacred ingenuity of tenderness. He seems to be always thinking of something for our good; while we, on our part, appear to be always testing his love in one way or another. Some fresh want is discovered only to receive a new supply of grace. Some fresh sin breaks out only to be blotted out with the ever-pardoning blood of Jesus. We get into fresh difficulties only to receive fresh aid. The further I go on my way to heaven, the more I do admire the road as well as wonder at the goal to which that road shall bring me. "O world of wonders!" said John Bunyan; "I can say no less." They tell us, nowadays, that the world is worn-out, and that there is no joy in life, and nothing fresh to afford delight. Ah, me! they talk of the attractions of fiction and of the playwright's art, and I know not what besides. They must needs travel all round the world to get a new sensation; and many a man, to-day, is like the Emperor Tiberius, who offered large sums of money to anyone who could invent a new pleasure, meaning, alas! too often, a new vice, or a new way of practising it. But staying at home with Christ has more wonders in it than gadding abroad with all the wisest of the world. There is more to marvel at in half an inch of the way to heaven than there is in a thousand leagues of the ordinary pathway of unbelieving men. They call their joys by the name of "life", and say that they must "see life"; but the apostle John tells us that "he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life;" that is to say, he is dead. Death has its varieties of worms and rottenness; there are charnel-houses *and* charnel-houses, various processes and methods of corruption, and no doubt there is a science that men may learn in the cemetery, and call it life, if they like; but, oh! if they did but once see Christ upon the cross, they would learn that they had been blind till then. If they did but know his lovingkindness, they would rejoice in it in the sick-

chamber, in the long weary night watches, when every bone prevented sleep; they would even recognize it in the arrows of death that smote wife, and child, and brother. They would see it, not only in the table loaded for the supply of hunger, and in the garments furnished against the cold, and in every common blessing of providence; but they would also see it in every despondency, in every deficiency, in every cross, and every loss; and, seeing it, they would keep on saying, "It is all for the best; it is all better than the best could have been if it had been left to me. It is marvellous; it is marvellous lovingkindness." I do believe that, when we get to heaven, one of the wonders of the glory-land will be to look back upon the road over which we have travelled. It will be marvellous to note the way in which God has led us; and we shall, as our hymn puts it,—

> "Sing with rapture and surprise,
> His lovingkindness in the skies."

I must now leave this part of my subject with you, only again urging you to think over the truth of which I have been speaking, that all God's lovingkindness to his people is marvellous.

II. Now, secondly, THIS LOVINGKINDNESS WE SHOULD DESIRE TO SEE. The psalmist says, "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness;" and we ought to ask God to let us see it; and that, I think, in four ways.

First, *let me see it with my intellect, that I may adore.* Help me, O blessed Spirit, to see and understand what is the lovingkindness of God to my soul! I know that it is written of some that "they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Let me be among the number of those truly wise ones. O Lord, make me wise to see the end and design of thy providence as well as the providence itself! Make me wise to perceive how thou hast prepared thy grace to meet my depravity, how thou dost adapt thine upholdings to the slipperiness of the way, and to the feebleness of my feet. Often shed a ray of light upon some passage in my life which, otherwise, I could not comprehend; and let the light stay there till I begin to see and to know why thou didst this and why thou didst that. "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness." I am sure, dear friends, that the lessons of a man's own life are too often neglected; but there is, in the life of any ordinary child of God,—let me pick you out wherever you may be, John, Mary, Thomas,—enough to fill you with wonder and admiration of the lovingkindness of the Lord if your mind be but sufficiently illuminated to perceive the hand of God in it, and to see what God purposed by it. He sometimes uses strange means for producing blessed results. With his sharp axe, he will cut down all our choice trees; as by a whirlwind or a tornado, he will devastate our gardens, and make our fields a desolation; and he will do it all in order that he may drive us away from the City of Destruction, and make us go on pilgrimage to the Celestial City, where the axe can never come, and the leaves will never fade. In his mysterious dealings with us, the Lord often seems to push us backward that we may go forward,

and to deluge us with sorrow that he may immerse us into blessing. That is his way of working wondrously; and if we did but understand it, according to the prayer of the text, "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness," we should be full of adoring wonder.

The next meaning I would give to this prayer would be, *Lord, show thy lovingkindness to my heart, that I may give thee thanks.* Lord, I know that thou hast been very good to me; but I pray thee to show my heart how good thou hast been, by letting me see how unworthy I have been of this thy kindness. It is very profitable, sometimes, to sit down, and rehearse the lovingkindness of God, mingling with it penitential reflections upon your own shortcoming. If you do this, you will at last break out with some such cry as this, "Why is all this mercy shown to me?" I know a dear brother in Christ, a clergyman, whose name is Curme; he divides it into two syllables, "*Cur me,*" so as to make it mean, "Why me? Why is all this goodness given to me, Lord?" And that is a question which I, too, would fain ask, "Why me, Lord?"

> "Why was I made to hear thy voice,
> And enter while there's room;
> When thousands make a wretched choice,
> And rather starve than come?"

Is this kindness, and this, and this, all meant for me? Can it really be intended for me? Such reflections as these will make me realize more than ever how "marvellous" is God's "lovingkindness" to me, and will fill my soul with adoring gratitude and thanksgiving.

Then, next, we ought to pray the Lord to *show his "marvellous lovingkindness" to our faith, that we may again confide in him.* If he will cause the eye of our faith to see that he has this "marvellous lovingkindness" toward us, we shall be the more ready to rely upon him in all the straits into which we may yet be brought. Dost thou believe it, my dear friend? Brother in Christ, dost thou believe that God loves thee? Thou knowest how sweet it is to be sure that thy child loves thee. Though it may well do so, because of its many obligations to thee, yet is it sweet for its warm cheek to touch thine, and to hear it say, "Father, I love you." But, oh! it is sweeter far for God to say, "I love you." Read the Song of Solomon through, and be not afraid to appropriate the message of that sweet and matchless Canticle. Hear in it the voice of Jesus saying to thee, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Such words as those may be sensuous to those who are sensuous, but they are deeply spiritual to those who are spiritual; and, oh, the bliss of having such words as those to come from the Christ of God to us! Why, sometimes, when our Lord thus speaks to us, we hardly know how to bear our excess of joy. I would not ask for a better holiday than to have one hour alone with Jesus; to be undisturbed by any earthly care, and just to think of nothing else but the love of God,—the love of God to me. Oh,

that it now were shed abroad, in all its fulness, in this poor heart of mine! O love divine, what is there that can ever match thine inexpressible sweetness? Truly it is "marvellous lovingkindness." Again I ask you,—Do you believe this? Are you sure you do? Pray God to show it to your faith distinctly and clearly, so that you shall be absolutely sure of it, and practically depend upon it whenever you need it.

One other meaning of the text may be, *show thy "marvellous lovingkindness" to me now in my experience, that I may rest in thee.* Let me now, at this present moment, O my God, experience something of that lovingkindness in my soul, in whatever condition I may happen to be, that I may be so flooded with the consciousness of it that I may do nothing else but sit in solemn silence before thee, and adore thee, while beholding the blazing splendour of thy love! I cannot say any more about this part of my theme, but must leave you to fill up the gaps in the sermon. This is not a topic upon which one should venture to speak if he wants to say all that should or could be said upon it.

III. So, thirdly, dear friends, I remark that IT SHOULD BE OUR DESIRE—and there are times when it should especially be our desire —TO SEE THIS "MARVELLOUS LOVINGKINDNESS" OF GOD DISPLAYED TO US IN ITS MARVELLOUSNESS.

I will make plain to you what I mean directly; and, first, we would see it *as pardoning great sin.* I expect we have here, in this assembly, at least one whose sin lies very heavy on his conscience. We do not find many such people come out to week-evening services, but yet I thank God that they do come here. Your sin is very great, dear friend. I cannot exaggerate it, because your own sense of its greatness far surpasses any descriptions I could give. You feel that, if God were to pardon you, it would be a marvellous thing. If he were, in one moment, to take all your guilt away, and to send you home completely forgiven, it would be a marvellous thing. Yes, it would, it would; but I beg you to pray this prayer, "Lord, show forth thy marvellous lovingkindness in me." God is constantly doing wonders; then, glorify his name by believing that he can work this miracle of mercy for you. Do not be afraid even to sing,—

> "Great God of wonders! all thy ways
> Are matchless, God-like, and divine;
> But the fair glories of thy grace
> More God-like and unrivall'd shine:
> Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> Or who has grace so rich and free?"

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and saved immediately. Trust him now; and marvellous though it will be to you, I have shown you that God's lovingkindness is all marvellous, and that the extraordinary is ordinary with God, and that the marvellous is but an every-day thing with him. Pray for this "marvellous lovingkindness" to be manifested to you, and you shall have it. One said, "If God ever saves me, he shall never hear the last of it." You may say the same, and resolve that,

henceforth, having had much forgiven, you will love much; having been saved from great sin, you will tell it on earth, and tell it in heaven; and, if you could, you would even wish to make hell itself resound with the wondrous story,—

> "'Tell it unto sinners tell,
> I am, I am out of hell;'—

"and what is more, I am on the road to heaven, for God's 'marvellous lovingkindness' has been shown to me."

So God's lovingkindness may be seen as pardoning great sin; and, next, it may be seen *as delivering from deep trouble.* I may be addressing some poor child of God who is sorely perplexed. These are very trying times, and we constantly meet with godly people, who have a sincere desire to provide things honest in the sight of all men, but who do not find it easy to do so. Some very gracious people have got into a cleft stick; and however they will get out, they cannot imagine. If this is your case, dear friend, I expect you feel very much as John Fawcett's hymn puts it,—

> "My soul, with various tempests toss'd,
> Her hopes o'erturn'd, her projects cross'd,
> Sees every day new straits attend,
> And wonders where the scene will end."

Well, now, if you are ever brought through all your troubles, it will be "marvellous lovingkindness" to you, will it not? Then, go to God with the prayer, "Show me thy marvellous lovingkindness," and he will do it. He will bring you up, and out, and through;—not, perhaps, in the way you would like to come, but he will bring you out in the best way. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Always expect the unexpected when you are dealing with God. Look to see, in God, and from God, what you never saw before; for the very things, which will seem to unbelief to be utterly impossible, will be those which are most likely to happen when you are dealing with him whose arm is omnipotent, and whose heart is faithful and true. God grant you grace, dear friend, thus to use the prayer of our text as the means of delivering you from deep trouble!

Here is another way to use it. I think you may pray it thus,—at all events, I mean to do so, whether you will or not,—"Lord, reveal thy marvellous lovingkindness to me, *so as to give me high joys and ecstasies of delight.*" I sometimes envy those good people who never go up and never go down, always keeping at one level; theirs must be a very pleasant experience indeed. Still, if ever I do get on the high horse, then I go up far beyond anything I can describe. If ever I do ride upon the clouds, then I do not envy the people who keep along the smooth road. Oh, what deep depressions some of us have had! We have gone down to the very bottoms of the mountains, and the earth with her bars has seemed

to be about us for ever; but, after just one glimpse of God's everlasting love, we have been up there where the callow lightnings flash, resting and trusting among the tempests, near to God's right hand. I think, nay, I am sure we may pray for this experience. Should not the preacher of the Word wish to know the fulness of love divine? Should not the teacher of the young long to learn all that he can concerning God's infinite love? Though this is the love that passeth knowledge, should not every Christian wish to know all that is knowable of this great love of God? Then let us pray, "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness." It was truly said, "Thou canst not see God's face, and live;" but I have been inclined to say, "Then, let me see God's face, and die." John Welsh said, when God was flooding his soul with a sense of his wondrous love, "Hold, Lord, hold! I am but an earthen vessel, and thou wilt break me." If I had been there, and I could have borne no more, I would have said, "Do not hold, Lord; break the poor earthen vessel, let it go all to pieces; but anyhow, let thy love be revealed in me!" Oh, that I might even die of this pleasurable pain of knowing too much of God, too much of the ineffable delight of fellowship with him! Let us be very venturesome, beloved, and pray, "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness."

And, when we have done that, I think we may put up this prayer for ourselves, *as to our own usefulness.* You want to do good, dear brother,—dear sister. Well, then, pray to God, "Show me thy marvellous lovingkindness, O Lord! Use even such a feeble creature as I am. Let heaven, and earth, and hell itself, see that thou canst save souls by poor ignorant men as well as by inspired apostles and learned doctors. Lord, in my chapel, show thy marvellous lovingkindness. Crowd it with people, and bring many of them to Christ. In my class, Lord, show thy marvellous lovingkindness. If there never was a Sunday-school class in which all were saved, Lord, let it be done in mine. Make it a marvellous thing." A dear brother, who prayed at the prayer-meeting before this service, kept on pleading that God would bless me again as he had done before. I liked that prayer; it was as if the friend meant to say to the Lord, "Whatever thou didst in years gone by, do the like over again. If ever it was a marvellous thing to see how the people thronged to hear the Word, Lord, make it more marvellous still." I recollect when some people called our early success "a nine days' wonder." Well, well, well, it has been a good long nine days, anyhow. But, oh, that we might have another nine days like it,—just such another nine days! May God be pleased to send us as many conversions as we had at the first,—ay, and I shall add, and ten times as many! And if ever there have been revivals in the Church of God that have been really marvellous, brothers and sisters, let us take up the cry, "Lord, show thy marvellous lovingkindness again. Send us another Whitefield, and another Wesley, if such will be the kind of men that will bless the world. Send us another Luther, another Calvin, another Zwingle, if such be the men that will bless the world. Lord, send us another Augustine, or another Jerome, if such be the men by whom thou wilt bless

the world. But, in some way or other, Lord, show us thy marvellous lovingkindness." "Oh, but!" some would say, "we do not want any excitement. That is an awful thing, you know,—anything like excitement." And, then, perhaps, they add, "We have heard so much of what has been done in previous revivals. It has all ended in smoke, and therefore we really dread the repetition of such an experience." Well, then, brother, you go home, and pray, "Lord, show me thy moderate lovingkindness." When you are on your knees, to-night, pray, "Lord, save half-a-dozen souls here and there.

> "'We are a garden wall'd around,
> Chosen and made peculiar ground;
> A little spot inclosed by grace
> Out of the world's wide wilderness;'—

"Lord, make it yet smaller, screw us up tighter still, to the glory of thy blessed name!" I don't think any of you can pray that prayer; you shall if you like; but, for my part, I mean to pray, and I hope many of you will join me in it, and may God hear us! "Show us thy marvellous lovingkindness." Oh, for some new miracle of mercy to be wrought in the earth! Oh, for some great thing to be done, such as was done of old! Shall it be so, or not? On this promise it shall depend: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." But if our mouths be not open, we cannot expect to get the blessing: "According to your faith be it unto you." The Lord grant that our faith may expect to see his "marvellous lovingkindness" displayed yet more and more! Amen and Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM XVII.

Verse 1. *Hear the right, O* LORD, *attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.*

Good men are often slandered and misunderstood; and, at such times, the first verse of this Psalm will well fit their lips: "Hear the right, O Lord." And, at all times, it is a great blessing when a suppliant can say to God, "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." It must be a dreadful thing to pray with lips that do not speak the truth. When men's thoughts are far away from their prayers, and they are muttering pious words but their heart is absent, what a mockery it must be in the sight of God! A dead prayer,—who will own it? It is like the child that was overlaid in the days of Solomon, which neither of the two mothers would own to be hers. Beware of dead prayers. You may dress them up as finely as you like; but, if there is no life in them, what good are they?

2. *Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.*

It is the appeal of a slandered man to the highest court; he takes his case into the Court of King's Bench, and asks God himself to give the verdict concerning what he had done. It is a good case that will bear to be so investigated.

3. *Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.*

Happy is the man who is not afraid for God to come to him suddenly in the night, or to pounce upon him, as it were, at any hour of the day, for, whenever he comes, he will find his servant so acting that he will not mind who examines his conduct. He is keeping his lip, purposing that it shall not transgress God's law, and he is ruling his whole body in like manner. Only the grace of God can enable us to do this.

4. *Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.*

Notice that verse, young man! There is much-needed teaching there for you. There are many "paths of the destroyer" in this wicked city of London, and all over the world; and it is only by taking heed to our ways, according to God's Word, that we can hope to escape from them. How pleasant those "paths of the destroyer" often appear to be! How smooth and how alluring they are! All sorts of supposed delicacies and beauties will tempt you to go that way, and the foolish heart readily inclines to these indulgences; but happy is the man whose judgment is enlightened by God's Word so that he avoids it, and passes by "the paths of the destroyer."

5. *Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*

"I know that I am in thy way; but, O Lord, hold me up! I am like a horse that needs a careful driver, else I shall trip and fall, in rough places or in smooth. 'Hold up my goings in thy paths,' for I may fall even there. There are the sins of my holy things, so 'hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.'"

6—12. *I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.*

Many godly men have such cruel enemies as David had, so they will do well to pray as he did:—

13—15. *Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: from men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me,—*

"What do I possess? What is my portion? Am I full of substance, like the men of the world, or have I little of this world's wealth? It is of small consequence, for, 'as for me,'"—

15. *I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*

That is our portion. God grant that we may prize it more and more! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—196, 18 (Version II.), 719.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PRESERVATION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 2ND, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, in the year 1855.

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."—John xvii. 15.

THE text, as we observed on a former occasion,* contains two prayers,—a negative prayer, and a positive prayer. First, there is *the negative prayer:* "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world." "There are wise ends to be observed by their remaining here. It will ultimately increase their happiness in heaven; it will give glory to God; it shall be the means of the conversion of others; therefore, 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world,' but I do pray"—and here comes *the positive prayer,*—"that, while they are in it, 'thou shouldest keep them from the evil.'"

I. Let us first, then, CONSIDER THE EVIL FROM WHICH CHRIST PRAYS THAT HIS PEOPLE MAY BE KEPT.

We have no hesitation in declaring that the only evil here intended is the evil of sin. It may be true that Jesus Christ pleads with his Father to preserve us from some of the direful afflictions which might be too much for our mortal frame to endure. It may be that, sometimes, the blows and attacks of the enemy are warded off by the arm of the intercession of Jesus. It may be that the great ægis of Almighty God is often held over our heads in matters of providence, to keep us from evil when we walk, and to guard us lest we dash our feet against a stone. We feel persuaded, however, that neither of these things is here intended; but that "the evil" so continually spoken of in Scripture, the evil pre-eminently here meant, is sin and nothing else: "I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

Afflictions are often beneficial, therefore Christ does not plead that we should be kept entirely from this kind of evil. Trial brings us to his feet, and gives new life to prayer, therefore Christ

* See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 47, "Christ's Prayer for His People."

has not asked that this bitter-sweet might not be given to us. Death itself, which seems an evil, is a good thing for believers; so Christ does not ask that we may not die. The petition he here puts up for his people is, "I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil,"—the special evil, the particular, the deadly evil of sin.

Let us here remark that *sin is an unqualified evil.* It is *the* evil without the mitigation of any good in it. In sin there can be no good; it is evil, only evil, and that continually. The lowest form of sin is "the evil", the highest is "the evil" more fully developed. Sin in an angel was "the evil", for it turned him into a devil; sin in Eden was "the evil", for it plucked up the fair trees by the roots, and blasted all their fruits, and sent Adam out to till the ground whence he was taken. Sin is always an evil; it brings no profit to anyone. It shall not profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; and in the Christian especially it is evil, nothing but evil; sin can never benefit him, it is an evil, only an evil, a powerful evil, and a dreadful evil; it is unmitigated evil, it is "the evil."

It is true, out of evil God bringeth good; sometimes, the very sins of God's people are overruled so as to preserve them from some greater sin, but that does not destroy "the evil." If God sends out bears from the wood to execute his commission, and they slay the mocking children, they are bears still; and if sin is sometimes made to be the means of honouring God, yet sin is sin notwithstanding any purpose that God may accomplish by it; and no false preaching can ever make us believe any doctrine which should take away the deadly character which by right belongs to sin. It is always hurtful and dangerous.

The Christian man, who trusts that, by any one sin, he may keep himself out of difficulty, or get himself out of difficulty, makes a terrible mistake. Sin cannot bring you good. "But," say you, "I am in great difficulties; my creditors are pressing me, what shall I do? If I could draw that accommodation bill, or forge that note, there might be some good in it." There cannot be any good in it. Sin is evil; it is "the evil"; it is "the evil" without a single particle of goodness; it is "the evil" without any mitigation whatsoever. "Oh!" says another, "if I were to do such-and-such a thing,—it is but a little evil,—I should then prosper in business; then I could dedicate myself to God, and serve him better; and so, out of the evil, I could bring a good. The end would justify the means." No; if the means be bad, they are bad; if the means be evil, they are evil. Sin is sin, and nothing but sin; and however there may, sometimes, appear to be temporary advantages in it, it is still evil, and only evil. What though the noxious draught may sometimes stimulate the man, and seem to make him mightier, it really weakens him, and it will ultimately destroy him. A man may fancy sin to be good; for a time, it may patch him up in respectability, and make him stand a little more favourably in the eyes of worldlings; but the house repaired with such rotten material as that shall fall, notwithstanding all that is done to prop it up.

All sin is unmitigated evil, and the only name we will give to it is "evil." Let the monster plead as it may, and ask us to call it good, we charge it with having slain our Lord; and we condemn it as an evil to be hated and avoided. A serpent may have beauteous azure hues upon his scales; but he is a deadly thing, and is to be crushed to the earth.

Next, we say that sin is "the evil" because it is *an unparalleled evil.* You can find nothing in the world so evil as sin. Nothing has so desolated this fair earth of ours as sin has. Tell me that war has slain its tens and hundreds of thousands, that earthquakes have shaken down vast cities, that pestilence has devoured millions; describe to me the concussion of the elements, speak to me of the wild uproar of nature abroad, and remind me of how it smites down man, and destroys his handiwork; but when you have written out the black catalogue of all the terrible things that have happened to man, I shall still tell you that sin stands up as the monster evil, the giant overtopping them all, head and shoulders above them, the most unqualified and unparalleled evil in the world. You ask me whether sin has done much evil, I answer you,—Yes. See Eden's garden blasted, a whole world drowned with water, even the tops of the mountains covered; see the earth open, and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram go down into the pit; see fire rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and see the cities of the plain, with all their inhabitants, destroyed. But sin has done more than that; it has digged a hell somewhere, we know not where,—not in the caverns of the earth. That were a direful thought, that this home of the righteous for a season should become the dwelling of the damned. If there be anything worse than that, sin is guilty of it, for it slaughtered Emmanuel, it slew the Lord of life and glory. Sin betrayed him, scourged him, put a crown of thorns upon his head, spit in his face, crucified him, nailed his hands and his feet to the accursed tree. Sin sat by, and watched him till he died; and that moment,—blessed be his name!—the sins of all his people were finished. Sin is unparalleled; no evil can compare with it. Find what evil you please, sin stands out first and foremost as "*the* evil."

Sin also, *in some sense, is an evil that has no remedy.* You may, perhaps, be somewhat startled by that thought, especially when you have so continually heard me say that the death of Christ takes away from a Christian the very guilt of his sin, so that he is not guilty before God, but stands accepted in Christ, with his Saviour's righteousness on, so that he can plead that before God, and even claim the merits imputed to him through Jesus. Still, what I have said is true,—that for sin there still remains no remedy, even to the Christian, when he has committed it. There is the remedy of forgiveness, so far as he is concerned; but there is no remedy for the sin itself. Where, for instance, is the remedy for a sinful word that I have spoken? Can my tears bring it back, and stop it from doing an injury to my fellow-creatures? Even though Christ has forgiven me, that will not end the wrong I may have done to others. When I drop a single stone of sin into the

ocean of this universe, it will continue to make circle after circle, ever expanding. I may, through my whole life, labour with more than seraphic zeal, and with a Christ-like heart, to undo the evil I have done; but not if I might work throughout eternity could I untie those knots that I have tied, or dash down those mountains that I have piled, or dry up the rivers I have digged. True, the sin is all forgiven, it will never be laid to my charge; but, methinks, though Christ has forgiven me, I shall never forgive myself some things in which I may have disgraced his name, and dishonoured his blessed person. When some of you old blasphemers recollect that some in hell were damned by your means, you may thank God that you are saved, but you cannot undo that ruin to immortal souls. Sin is *the* evil. Well might Jesus pray for his people, "Father, keep them from the evil," for an evil it is, which, though it has a remedy as to itself, has no remedy as to its consequences upon others. God grant that any evils, which we may have wrought, may be as much remedied as it is possible they may be by the future holiness of our lives!

Once more, *sin is a most pestilent evil, because it brings every other evil with it.* Methinks, the worst evil sin has ever done to me is this, it has sometimes robbed me of the presence of my blessed Master. There have been seasons when the Spirit has been withdrawn from me. There have been times when I have sought my Beloved, and have not found him; when I have ardently desired his presence, but could not find it, and my only song was,—

> "What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
> How sweet their memory still!
> But now I find an aching void
> The world can never fill."

Sin was that veil that came between me and my Lord. Dear old Joseph Irons used to say, "Christ often hides his face behind the clouds of dust his own children kick up." So we make dust by our sins, and Christ hides behind it; we build a wall by our transgressions, and our Beloved hideth behind that wall. Ah, sin, thou art indeed an evil, for thou hast robbed me of his sweet society, and taken away his blessed company! Thou hast been sitting on the throne of my heart, and he will not abide such an insult; he will not stop where sin is. Thou hast entered into my soul, and Jesus has said, "I will not tarry where there is sin; my presence shall drive out sin, or sin shall drive out my presence." "O sin, how much misery I experience through thee!" the Christian can say. Ah, sin! how many poor and fettered believers have had their fetters first forged by thee? Sin, thou art the anvil on which our doubts are welded; sin, thou art the fire in which our spirits are often molten down to grief. We could do all things were it not for thee. O sin, thou dost clip the wings of faith, thou dost damp the flame of love, thou dost destroy the energy of zeal; thou art "the evil"; my Master calls thee so, and such thou art. Thou needest not to be renamed; that name once given thou shalt bear for ever, and throughout eternity thou shalt be pointed at, in the pillory of

scorn, by all the saints, as "the evil." Well might Christ ask his Father that, while he did not wish his children to be taken out of the world, he did wish that they might be kept from the evil.

I charge you, ye young converts, who are about to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, recollect that sin is "*the* evil." Through all your future lives, you must remember that this is "the evil" you are to shun. Fear not affliction, fear not persecution; rather, rejoice, and be exceeding glad if that should be your lot, for great is your reward in heaven; but, I charge you, fear sin. I commend you to the God of all grace, who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory; but yet I beg you always to recollect that sin itself is "the evil" to you. It will always be so to you so long as you live, and, though forgiven, it is still sin pardoned. Shun it in the least degree, do not give way to little sins, and you will not give way to big ones. Remember the proverb, "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves;" beware of little sins, and you will not commit great ones. I charge you, keep your hearts in the love of God; and may God himself preserve you, according to our Saviour's prayer, "that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

II. We can make only a very few remarks upon the second point; which is, THE DANGER TO WHICH CHRIST'S PEOPLE ARE EXPOSED.

Is there any danger of Christian men running into sin? After they have believed in Jesus, and after they have been pardoned, will they again commit sin? After they have been adopted into God's family, will they sin? Will they, can they, sin after all that? O beloved! I thought once, when my Lord first pardoned me, that I never could sin against him any more. When, black from head to foot, he spake the cleansing word, and made me white; when he took off my rags, and clothed me in royal garments, and kissed me with the kisses of his love, and showed me his deep, affectionate heart, I thought, "O thou blessed Jesus! can I ever again sin against thee? Can it be that I, a pardoned rebel, whom thou hast forgiven so much, could do such a thing?" "No, precious Jesus," the young convert thinks, "I can come and wash thy feet with my tears, and wipe them with the hairs of my head; but I cannot sin, I will not sin." Ah! how soon is that beautiful vision taken away! How soon the theory is spoiled by experience!

Beloved, do you not find that you are in danger of sinning now? Those of us who are young,—what danger of sinning we are in! While our passions are strong, and our lusts furious, we have need to be kept of God, or we shall sin against him. And you middle-aged gentlemen, to you also I have a word or two to say. You always pray so particularly for the young, and the young people are very much obliged to you; and they always intend to pray specially for you, because you are in the most dangerous position. I remind you of what I have told you before, that there is in Scripture no instance of a young man falling into sin, but there is more than one such instance of a middle-aged man.

Ye grandsires with snowy heads, whose hairs are whitened with age, know ye not that ye still have need of divine keeping, or ye

will fall? O ye veterans in the army of the Lord, do you not acknowledge that, if his grace were withdrawn from you, you have enough tinder in your hearts to catch fire, for your souls are not yet perfectly purified? When I ask my old brethren whether sin is still present with them, each one of them always says, "Well, I thought I had a bad heart once, but I know I have now; I thought I was vile once, but I know I am now. I grow viler and viler as the years roll on, and I see myself to be more and more so every day." Is it not so with you? Ah! is it not just so with you perpetually? And will you not confess, till your last dying moment, that you will be kept if God keeps you; but that, if he were to leave you, you would be lost? I was pleased to hear some of the good answers the young people gave me when I asked them, "Do you think you will be kept faithful to Christ to the end?" "Yes; by God's grace," they said. "But suppose God should leave you?" I next asked, and how exceedingly proper the answer was! "God will not leave me, so I cannot tell anything about that." That was a sweet way of answering the question. He has promised that he will not leave us, nor forsake us; so, Christian, while we warn you of the danger if God should leave you, we comfort you by telling you that he will not leave you.

Mark the terrible threatening that those poor Arminians have been spoiling so much. Those who know nothing of the doctrines of grace make out that sinners fall, and come in again, and fall again, and come in again; but a more unscriptural doctrine cannot be propounded, for God solemnly declares that, if it were possible for a man, once regenerated and sanctified, to apostatize, he would be lost beyond all remedy, and there would remain no hope for him, "but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." I charge you to recollect that, if it were possible for you thus to fall, there is the precipice over which you must drop. There is no ransom for you in such a case as that. If true conversion fails, God will never try twice; if once he puts his hand on you, and fails, he has done with you. But it is not possible, glory be to his name! He has not failed yet, and he never will. Still, we warn you, and Scripture tells us so to do, to remember that we shall be kept only through faith unto salvation, and that our Lord Jesus Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

III. This brings us to speak, thirdly, concerning THE KEEPER OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE: "I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

We often get keeping ourselves, beloved, and a bad job we make of it, when we do that. If a Christian man tries to keep his own heart without asking the help of God, he will be just as good a keeper as those guards whom Herod set to watch the apostle Peter, and who, when they opened the prison doors in the morning, found

that the prisoner had escaped. You may stand and watch your heart without God, but you will find that it has escaped, and gone after sin notwithstanding. The Christian must not trust to his guarding himself, because he will sometimes be asleep, and then the enemy will catch him unawares. People are often ready, as the saying is, to put a lock on the stable door when the horse is gone, and Christians are sometimes very careful after they have sinned. Ah! but the thing is to lock the door while the horse is in the stable, and to take care before you do sin. It is better to keep your house from being on fire, than to get the fire put out ever so quickly.

We all of us have need thus to be kept by God. We think we can keep ourselves, but we cannot, for poor flesh and blood will fail; though the spirit may be willing, the flesh is weak; and if it were possible for us to keep ourselves a little while, we should soon be overcome with spiritual slumber; and then, you know, the devil would come walking into the camp in the middle of the night, and if he caught us slumbering, and off our guard, he would, if allowed of God, hurry us away to perdition. If you trust yourselves to God, he will preserve you; but if you try to keep yourselves, you will fail. How many different schemes people have for keeping themselves from sin! Why do they not go and ask God to keep them, instead of binding themselves hand and foot to this thing and the other, and so thinking to avoid sin? Let us give our hearts to God thoroughly, for he will preserve his own people. Oh! what a gracious promise the Lord has given concerning his vineyard: "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Is not that a precious expression, "I the Lord do keep it"? The Lord seems to speak in his own defence, "They say I do not keep it, but I do. They say that I let my people fall away, but I do not. Look at my vineyard, 'I the Lord *do* keep it,' whatever they may say; 'I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.'" This is the only ground of our confidence, that God keepeth the feet of his saints, and none that trust in him shall be desolate.

We must now conclude, praying on behalf of the Lord's people that God would keep them. Recollect, believer, that *while it says God will keep you, he does it by means.* You must look after each other; I like to admonish you to look after your brethren and sisters. Why, there are some of you sitting with only a rail between you, and yet you do not know your next-door neighbours. Some of you, I know, talk too much sometimes; but I would rather you should talk a little too much than not talk at all. Oh, how little like Christians some of you are; sitting down side by side, and yet not knowing one another! The church is meant to be a place where we shall be like children at home. Be sure to look after these young friends who are coming into the church; try and take care of them. We want a few fathers who will lead them in the right way. Poor souls, you cannot expect them to know much; some of them, indeed, may have been long in the service of God, others have just commenced to run the Christian race;

you must look after the young ones, and then the prayer of Christ will be fulfilled in their case, "I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

Finally, *remember that the only Keeper of the saints is God*, and put your souls day by day into his hands. I beseech you, by the love of Christ, forget not his holy prayer of which I have been speaking to you. Often meditate upon the grace that put you into the Saviour's custody. Oh! forget not that you have been his from all eternity, and that it ill becomes you to sin; that you are elect in Christ, and it would be a disgrace to you to transgress. Recollect that you are one of the aristocracy of the universe, you must not mix with vile worldlings. Remember that the blood royal of heaven runs in your veins; therefore, do not disgrace yourselves by acts which might be tolerated in a beggar, but which would demean a prince of the heavenly household. Stand on your dignity, think of your future glory; recollect where you stand, and in whom you stand—in the person of Jesus. Fall at his feet daily; grasp his strength hourly, crying out,—

> "Oh, for this no power have I!
> My strength is at thy feet to lie."

O beloved, you who do not love the Lord, I cannot pray that God would keep you from the evil, because you are in it already; but I do pray God to take you out of it. There are some of you who do not feel sin to be an evil; and shall I tell you why? Did you ever try to pull a bucket up a well? You know that, when it is full of water, you can pull it easily so long as the bucket remains in the water; but when it gets above the water, you know how heavy it is. It is just so with you. While you are in sin, you do not feel it to be a burden, it does not seem to be evil; but if the Lord once draws you out of sin, you will find it to be an intolerable, a heinous evil. May the Lord, this night, wind some of you up! Though you are very deep down, may he draw you up out of sin, and give you acceptance in the Beloved! May you have new hearts and right spirits, which are alone the gift of God! Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." God give you grace to ask, and seek, and knock, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH XLIX. 1—23.

Verses 1, 2. *Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; the* LORD *hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;*

Our Lord Jesus, that great Prophet of the Church, was in a special

manner the Lord's in the matter of his birth. A wondrous holy mystery hangs about his birth at Bethlehem,—he was, in that respect, the Lord's in a very remarkable sense.

"He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword." You know how our Lord's mouth, or the word of his gospel that issues from his mouth, is like a sharp sword,—how it conquers,—how it cuts its way,—how, wherever it comes, it pierces "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

"In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me." You know how the protecting hand of God ever covered Christ, and how his gospel is ever sheltered by the providence of God.

3. *And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.*

It is wonderful condescension on Christ's part to take the name of his Church so that he himself is called "Israel" in this passage; and there is another passage, equally remarkable, where the Church is allowed to take one of the names of Christ: "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." Such an intermingling of interests, such a wonderful unity is there between Christ and his Church, that these twain are truly one.

4. *Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the* LORD, *and my work with my God.*

Our Saviour did, in his earthly ministry, to a large extent labour in vain. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet how few of them recognized him as the good Shepherd. He told his disciples that, after he returned to his Father, those who believed in him should do even greater things than he had done. That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost; and since then it has been fulfilled over and over again in the history of the Christian Church.

5. *And now, saith the* LORD *that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the* LORD, *and my God shall be my strength.*

What though the Jews still reject the Messiah, their sin does not affect his honour. His glory is still as great as ever it was in the esteem of the Most High.

6. *And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

What a blessed passage this is for you and for me, beloved! Strangers to the commonwealth of Israel were we; but, now, we who were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Jesus, and so are made fellow-heirs with the seed of Abraham, partakers of the self-same covenant blessing as the father of the faithful enjoys. In this let us exceedingly rejoice; and for this, let us praise and magnify the name of the Lord.

7. *Thus saith the* LORD, *the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth,—*

What a true picture this is of the way in which the Jews still treat the promised Messiah! To this day, they gnash their teeth at the very mention of the name of Jesus of Nazareth; and the bitterest words of blasphemy that are ever uttered by human lips come from the mouth of Israel against the Lord Jesus: "him whom the nation abhorreth,"—

7. *To a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the* LORD *that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.*

The Father has chosen Christ to be the precious corner-stone of the eternal temple, and he has also chosen all the living stones that are to be joined to him for ever.

8, 9. *Thus saith the* LORD, *In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.*

Dear brethren, what honour the Lord has put upon Christ! In proportion as he has been the despised of men, and the abhorred of the Jewish nation, God has made him to be his own delight, his Well-beloved. He displays through him the marvels of his saving power for his own glory. I pray that it may be displayed in our midst just now, and in the way mentioned here: "I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves." Come, beloved, after you receive such a message as this from God's mouth, what prison can hold you? What darkness can conceal you? The word of Christ shall break your bonds asunder, and change your darkness into the glory of noonday. May this gracious work be done for any of you who are prisoners here!

10. *They shall not hunger nor thirst;—*

To the woman at the well, Christ said, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." That is a parallel to this passage: "They shall not hunger nor thirst;"—

10. *Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*

Oh, the wondrous sweetness of these exceeding great and precious promises! They are all concerning Christ, you see; undoubtedly, they are given with an eye to us, but yet much more with an eye to him, that he may be glorified in the deliverance and guidance of his people, in the protection of them from danger, and in the abundant provision for the supply of all their needs. It would not be for Christ's honour to let you die of thirst, poor thirsty one; it would not glorify him to lead you where there were no springs of water. Be sure, then, that God will always do that which will glorify his Son, and he will therefore deal well with you for his sake.

11, 12. *And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.*

From far-away China, they must come to Christ; the result of his death is not left to haphazard. Some say that his death did something or other, which, somehow or other, will benefit somebody or other; but we never speak in that indefinite way. We know that Christ, by his death, did eternally redeem his people, and we are quite sure that he will have all those for whom he laid down the ransom price. He died with a clear intent, a definite purpose; and "for the joy that was set before him," he "endured the cross, despising the shame." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." The divine intent and purpose of the death of Christ cannot possibly be frustrated. He reigneth from the tree, and he shall win and conquer world without end.

13. *Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the* LORD *hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.*

How? Why, by the very coming of Christ, by his birth at Bethlehem, and all the blessings which come with the Incarnate God, his afflicted ones are consoled, and all his people are divinely comforted. Shall we not, then, rejoice in Christ, who is himself so full of joy that he teaches the very heavens to sing, and the mountains to break forth into praise?

14. *But Zion said,—*

Hear the lament of the poor Jewish Church, like a castaway left all alone,—

14. *The* LORD *hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.*

When we are glad in the Lord, and are singing out our heart's joy, there is pretty sure to be someone or other who sorrowfully sighs, "The Lord hath forsaken me."

People say that there never was a feast so well furnished but that somebody went away unsatisfied; but God will not have it so at his festivals; and hence, the rest of the chapter shows how the Lord comforted this poor Zion, whose lamentation and mourning he had heard. Notice how he begins:—

15. *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?*

"Can a woman"—the tenderer parent of the two,—"forget her child,"—her own child, her feeble little child that still depends upon her for its nutriment and life,—"her sucking child,"—

15. *Yea, they may forget,—*

It is just possible; there have been such monstrosities: "they may forget,"—

15. *Yet will I not forget thee.*

"Yet, saith the Lord, should nature change,
And mothers monsters prove,
Sion still dwells upon the heart
Of everlasting love."

How that gracious assurance should comfort the little handful, the "remnant weak and small" of God's people among the Jews! How it should also comfort any of God's servants who are under a cloud, and who have lost for a while the enjoyment of his presence!

16. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;—*

Where they must be seen, and where he can do nothing without touching his people while doing it. When a name is engraven on the hand with which a man works, that name goes into his work, and leaves its impress on the work.

16, 17. *Thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee.*

Jerusalem, the very Jerusalem that is in Palestine, shall be rebuilt. God will remember her walls, and the Church of God in Israel shall yet rise from that sad low estate in which it has been these many centuries; and all God's cast-down ones shall be comforted, and his churches, that seem to be left to die, shall be raised up again, for our God is no changeling. His heart does not come and go towards the sons of men.

"Whom once he loves, he never leaves,
But loves them to the end."

18. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee.*

What are all converted Gentiles doing, after all, but coming to the one Church? It is no longer a matter of Jew or Gentile, but all who believe are one in Christ Jesus. Let poor Zion rejoice that she herself is enriched by the conversion of these far-off sinners of the Gentiles.

18. *As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.*

Converts are the garments of the church, her bridal array, her ornaments and her jewels. I wish that all churches thought so; but many of them think that gorgeous architecture, the garnishing of the material building in which they meet, and the sound of sweet music, and the smell of fragrant incense and choice flowers, make up the dignity and glory of a church; but they do no such thing. Converts are the true glory of a church: "Thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth."

19, 20. *For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other,—*

The children of thy childlessness,—so it runs,—the children of thy widowhood. It was strange that she should have children then; it is not so among men, but it is so with the Church of God: "The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other,"—

20—23. *Shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet;—*

I have heard this passage quoted as a reason why there should be a State Church,—that kings should nourish the Church,—Henry VIII., for instance, and George IV. It was poor milk, I am sure, that they ever gave the Church of God. Yet I have no objection whatever to this text being carried out to the full,—ay, to the very letter,—only mind where the kings are to be put. What place does the verse say that they are to occupy? "They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet." There is no headship of the Church here, nothing of that sort; the kings are to be at the feet of the Church, and that is what the State ought to do, submit itself to God, and obey his commands, and give full liberty to the preaching of the gospel. This is all that the true Church of Christ asks, and all she can ever fairly take if she is loyal to her Lord.

23. *And thou shalt know that I am the LORD.*

"Jehovah." "Thou shalt understand the greatness of thy God, his infiniteness, his majesty, his all-sufficiency· 'Thou shalt know that I am the I AM.'"

23. *For they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.*

Glory be to his holy name, none that wait for him shall ever have cause to be ashamed; may we all be of that blessed number, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME."

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 9TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 23rd, 1881.

"Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"—Matthew iii. 7.
"Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."—Hebrews vi. 18.

WE will first consider the question of John the Baptist: "When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" I have no doubt that the Pharisees and Sadducees were very much surprised to hear John addressing them in that way; for men, who wish to win disciples, ordinarily adopt milder language than that, and choose more attractive themes, for they fear that they will drive their hearers from them if they are too personal, and speak too sharply. There is not much danger of that nowadays, for the current notion abroad now is that gospel ministers can sew with silk without using a sharp needle; and that, instead of piercing men with the sword of the Spirit, they should show them only the hilt of it; let them see the bright diamonds on the scabbard, but never let them feel the sharpness of the two-edged blade. They should always comfort, and console, and cheer, but never allude to the terror of the Lord.

That appears to be the common interpretation of our commission; but John the Baptist was of quite another mind. There came to a him a Pharisee, a very religious man, one who observed all the details of external worship, and was very careful even about trifles, a firm believer in the resurrection, and in angels and spirits, and in all that was written in the Book of the law, and also in all the traditions of his fathers, a man who was overdone with external religiousness, a Ritualist of the first order, who felt that, if there was a righteous man in the world, he certainly was that one. He must have been greatly taken aback when John talked to him about the wrath of God, and plainly told him that that wrath was as much for him as for other people. Those phylacteries and the

broad borders of his garment, of which he was so proud, would not screen him from the anger of God against injustice and transgression; but, just like any common sinner, he would need to "flee from the wrath to come." I daresay that the Sadducee was equally taken aback by John's stern language. He, too, was a religious man, but he combined with his religion greater thoughtfulness than the Pharisee did;—at least, so he said. He did not believe in traditions, he was too large-minded to care about the little details and externals of religion. He observed the law of Moses, but he clung rather to the letter of it than to its spirit, and he did not accept all that was revealed, for he denied that there was such a thing as an angel or a spirit. He was a Broad Churchman, a man of liberal ideas, fully abreast of the age. He professed to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews; yet, at the same time, the yoke of religion rested very lightly upon his shoulders. Still, he was not irreligious; yet here is John the Baptist talking to him, as well as to the Pharisee, about "the wrath to come." They would both have liked to have a little argument with him, but he talked to them about fleeing from the wrath to come. They would both have been pleased to discuss with him some theological questions, and to bring up the differences between their two sects, just to hear how John would handle them, and to let them see which way he would lean. But he did not waste a moment over the matters in dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees; the one point he had to deal with was the one of which he would have spoken to a congregation of publicans and harlots, and he spoke of it in just the same way to these nominally religious people. They must "flee from the wrath to come;" or else, as surely as they were living men, that wrath would come upon them, and they would perish under it. So John just kept to that one topic; he laid the axe to the root of the trees as he warned these hypocritical professors to escape for their lives, else they would perish in the common destruction which will overwhelm all ungodly men. This was not the style of preaching that John's hearers liked; but John did not think of that. He did not come to say what men wished him to say, but to discharge the burden of the Lord, and to speak out plainly what was best for men's eternal and immortal interests. He spoke, therefore, first, concerning the wrath of God; and, next, he spoke concerning the way of escape from that wrath.

Those shall be our two topics also. First, *the tremendous peril:* "the wrath to come;" and, secondly, *the means of escape:* "Flee from the wrath to come."

I. First, dear friends, let us think of THE TREMENDOUS PERIL which overtakes all men who do not escape from it.

That tremendous peril is *the wrath of God.* There is a wrath of God, which abides on every ungodly man. Whether men like that truth or not, it is written, "God is angry with the wicked every day;" and, also, "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God;" and yet again, "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

But *this wrath is in abeyance for a time;* and, consequently, men do not think much either of the wrath that now is, or of "the wrath to come." It will not, however, always be in abeyance. The sluices of the great deep will be pulled up, and the awful torrents will come leaping forth, and will utterly overwhelm all who are exposed to their fury. This "wrath to come" will in part fall upon men at death, but more fully at the day of judgment, and it will continue to flow over them for ever and ever. This "wrath to come" is that of which John spake, and of which we will now think for a while.

I remark, first, that *this "wrath to come" is absolutely just and necessary.* If there be a God, he cannot let sin go unpunished. If he be really God, and the Judge of all the earth, he must have an utter abhorrence of all evil. It cannot be possible that he should think the same of the honest and the dishonest, of the chaste and the unchaste, of the sober and the drunken, of the truthful and the lying, of the gracious and the dissolute. Such a god as that would be one whom men might rightly despise; but the true God, if we understand aright what he is, must hold all sin in detestation. All evil must be utterly abhorrent to his pure and holy soul; and it is not only because he can do it, but because he must do it, that he will, one of these days, let loose the fury of his wrath against sin. As it is necessary, in the very nature of things, that there should be certain laws to govern his creation, so is it equally necessary, in the very nature of things, that sin should be punished, and that every transgression and disobedience should receive a just recompense of reward. This is the inevitable consequence of sin; there is nothing arbitrary about such a result. It is fixed, in the very nature of things, that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment;" and for every sinful action, they must appear before the bar of God. Do not think, when we speak about the wrath of God, that we picture God to you as a tyrant. We do but tell you that this is only the nature of things,—that just as if you take poison, it will kill you; or if you indulge in drunkenness, or if you take almost any form of disease, it will bring pain and mischief to you,—so, sin must bring upon you the wrath of God, it cannot be otherwise. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of God's law can pass away till all be fulfilled, and one part of that law requires that he should punish all transgression, iniquity, and sin.

And if now, for a time, the full manifestation of that anger is delayed, I beseech you, men and brethren, do not therefore trifle with it. The longer God's arm is uplifted, the more terrible will be the blow when at last he strikes. To sin against the patience and longsuffering of Almighty God, is to sin with a vengeance. You do, as it were, defiantly put your finger into the very eye of God when you know that he sees you sin, and yet you go on sinning because he does not immediately take vengeance upon you for all your evil works. It is in great love that he restrains his wrath, for he is "slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." But as

a torrent, that is dammed up for a while, gathers force and strength, and every hour in which it is kept back it gets to be more irresistible, so must it be with "the wrath to come" when at last it does come upon you. If it has waited for some of you for seventy, or sixty, or fifty, or even for twenty years, it will come as an overwhelming flood when at length it bursts the barriers which at present hold it back. Trifle not, therefore, with that long-suffering of God which may be blest to your salvation.

Nor is "the wrath to come" any the less sure because it is delayed. Because sentence is not at once given against an evil work, therefore men say, "We need not trouble ourselves. 'How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?' Behold, he winks at our iniquities; he counts them as mere trifles. No harm will come to us because of them." But, sirs, if you are prepared to cast away the Bible, I can understand a little that you should talk like that; but if you really believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God, you know what the consequences of your sin must be. Concerning the wicked, it is written, "If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death." Even if you are so foolish as to cast away your Bibles, yet, unless you think yourselves to be mere dogs and cattle that shall rot back into the ground from whence you came, and be done with for ever, you must expect that there will be another state of existence in which right shall be vindicated and wrong shall be punished. It seems to lie upon the very conscience of man, in the unwritten code of intuitive knowledge, or of knowledge handed down from father to son, that there must come a time in which God will surely bring every secret thing to light, and visit with judgment the proud and the high-handed oppressor, and vindicate the rights of men and the rights of his own throne. It must be so; and if the wrath tarries for a while, it is none the less sure.

I feel quite staggered as I try to speak of this "wrath to come" because, *when it does come, it must be something very terrible because divinity enters into the essence of it.* The wrath of man is sometimes very terrible; but what must the wrath of God be? O sirs, I have tried, these many years, humbly yet earnestly to preach the love of God, and I have never yet reached the height of that great argument, for his love is boundless; but so are all his attributes; and if you consider any one of them, you must say, "It is high, I cannot attain unto it." But the just indignation of God against sin must be commensurate with his absolute purity. That man, who trifles with right and wrong, and thinks that these are mere arbitrary terms, has no indignation when he sees wrong done; but God, who is infinitely pure and holy, cannot—it is not possible that he should—look upon sin without an awful abhorrence. "Oh!" says he, by the mouth of his servant Jeremiah, "do not this abominable thing that I hate." He is not indifferent to sin, but he hates it, and he pleads with men not to do it because it is so abominable and so hateful in his sight.

What will "the wrath to come" be? If God but touches a man,

as it were, with only his little finger, the strongest must at once fail and fall, the mightiest can scarcely open his eyes, and the seal of death is speedily imprinted on his brow. But what will it be when the hand of God shall begin to plague the ungodly, when he shall pour out all the vials of his wrath upon them, and crush them with the bosses of his buckler? What will be their portion when he says, "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies"? Think, too, what must be the meaning of that terrible passage,—let me repeat it to you slowly and solemnly, —"Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

Thus have I faithfully tried to set before you "the wrath to come." Now listen to me for a few minutes, and let me have your impartial judgments, while I still further speak upon this important theme. Who, think you, are the more honest men,—those who tell you plainly what the Scriptures say concerning this wrath of God, or those who smooth it over, or deny it altogether? I will not judge them; before the Judge of quick and dead let those appear who dare to be apologists for sin, and to diminish the dread thought of God's anger against it. But I might, without any breach of Christian charity, be permitted to suspect the honesty of those who use flattering words to please and deceive their hearers; but I could not suspect the honesty of those who preach an unpalatable truth which grieves themselves as much as it is distasteful to those who hear it.

Let me also ask you which style of preaching has the greater moral effect upon yourself? Will you be likely to go and sin after you have heard of God's anger against it, or will you more readily commit iniquity when you have it salved over, and you are told that it is but a little thing, of which God takes no account? I was in the cabin of a vessel, one day, with a brother-minister who was disputing with me upon the non-eternity of future punishment; and a friend came in, and said, "What are you discussing down here? The scenery is beautiful, come up on deck, and admire it." So I said to him, "This is the question in dispute, whether the punishment of sin is eternal, or not." "Well," said he, "we cannot have any theological discussion just now;" but, turning to my opponent, he said, "Don't you go on deck, and talk to my sailors any of your rubbish. They are bad enough as they are; but if you tell them what I heard you say just now, they will swear and drink worse than ever." Then, turning to me, he said, "You may talk to the men as much as you like; you will do them good, and not harm by telling them that God will certainly punish their sin." Now, there is common sense in that argument of my friend; you know that there is. That which is most likely to do good, and to repress sin, is most likely to be right; but that which gives me latitude to offend my conscience, leads me to suspect whether it could ever have come from God at all, and makes me seriously doubt whether it can be true.

And what, sirs, will be the consequence if it should turn out that we are mistaken when we preach to you concerning the wrath of

God? What losers will those of us be who have fled to Christ for refuge? But suppose it should turn out that we are right, where will you be who have despised the wrath of God? We have two strings to our bow; but, to my mind, you have none at all. I would not like to lie down upon my death-bed in the hope that death would be an eternal sleep; that would be a miserable hope even if it could ever be fulfilled. I would not like to risk my destiny in the world to come upon the prospect of being annihilated because I was an unbeliever. It would be a wretched thing to hope for; but what if even that poor hope should fail me? Where should I be then? But I can go with confidence before my God, and say to him, "Be thy wrath what it may,—I know that it must be terrible to the last degree,—but be it what it may, I will not dare it; and even if it would not hurt me, yet I would not make thee angry, O God, by sinning against thee; and if there were no punishment for sin but the loss of thy love, if there were nothing but the loss of heaven, the loss of having failed to please thee, my God, I would count that loss to be tremendous and terrible. Let me be reconciled to thee, my Maker. Tell me how thou canst be just, and yet forgive the guilty. To thee I fly; oh, save me from the wrath to come!"

Thus have I set before you, as best I can, the tremendous peril.

II. Now, in the second place, I want, just for a few minutes, to tell you about THE MEANS OF ESCAPE. John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

By this question, he seemed to imply that *there is no way of deliverance from "the wrath to come" but by flight.* Sinner, thou canst not endure the wrath of God. If thy ribs were granite, and thy nerves were brass, thou couldest not endure the wrath of the Almighty; nay, not even for a moment. If a man had the tooth-ache, how dreadful it would seem to him to have to bear that pain for twelve months for certain, even if he knew that there would be an end to it then; but what must the anger of God be when he comes to deal with our entire manhood, and to punish our sin for ever and ever? We cannot bear it; we must flee from it. What does this mean?

It means, first, *immediate action.* Thou must escape, man. If thou remainest where thou now art, thou wilt certainly perish. Thou art in the City of Destruction which is to be overwhelmed with the fiery flood of "the wrath to come." Thou must be in earnest to escape from it ere judgment is executed upon the place, and all who are in it; thou must "flee from the wrath to come."

Fleeing means, not only immediate action, but *swift action.* He that flees for his life does not creep and crawl; he runs at his utmost speed, and he wishes that he could ride on the wings of the wind. No pace that he can reach is fast enough for him. Oh, if God the Holy Spirit will make you, whom I am now addressing, feel your imminent danger, you will want to fly to Christ with the swiftness of the lightning-flash; you will not be satisfied to linger as you are even for another hour. What if that gallery should fall about

your ears? What if God should smite the house while you are still in your sins? What if, in walking home, you should walk into your graves? What if your beds should become your tombs? It may be so with any one of you, so there is no time to linger or delay. Haste is the word for you; God sends it to you, and says, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;" "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

To flee means also *to go straight away at your object.* A man who flees for his life does not want any circuitous, round-about roads. He takes short cuts, he goes over hedge and ditch that he may get where he wants to be in the shortest possible space of time. So, straight away to Jesus is the only direction for you just now. Some people will recommend you to read books which I am certain you cannot understand, for no living soul can; or perhaps you may meet with persons who want to explain to you some wondrous mystery. Listen to them, if you like, at the day of judgment, when the great business of your salvation is over; but just now you have not any time for mysteries, you have no time for puzzlements, you have no time to be confused and confounded; the one thing you have to do is to go straight away to Jesus, straight away to Jesus. You are a sinner, and he is the only Saviour for sinners; so, trust him, God help you to trust him, and thus to find immediate salvation! It is a straight road to Christ. The plan of salvation is not a thing that is hard to be understood. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;" and he shall never come into condemnation; for he has passed from death unto life. There is the gospel in a nutshell; lay hold of it, and live by it. You have not time for anything else, and you have no need of anything else; so flee, "flee from the wrath to come."

Notice how John the Baptist explained to those Pharisees and Sadducees the way in which they had to flee. He told them, first, that *they must repent.* There is no going to heaven by following the road to hell. There is no finding pardon while continuing in sin. Depend upon it, Mr. Drunkard, you will not be forgiven for your drunkenness if you still go on with your drinking. Let not the man who is unchaste imagine that he can go on with his sin and yet be forgiven. Let not the thief dream that there is any pardon for him unless he quits his evil course, and tries to make such restitution as he can to those whom he has wronged.

There must be repentance, then, and *that repentance* must be practical. Note how John put it: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,"—evidences of true amendment of life. It is no use whining and crying, and going into the enquiry-rooms with a lie in your right hand, and then going home to swear and drink, or to break the Sabbath, and to live as you like, and all the while hoping to enter heaven. No, sin and you must part, or else Christ and you can never keep company. You remember that message that John Bunyan thought he heard when he was playing at tip-cat on the Sunday on the village green. He suddenly stood still with the stick in his hand, for he thought he heard a voice saying to him, "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven, or have thy sins,

and go to hell?" That is the alternative which both the law and the gospel put before men. "Flee from the wrath to come;" but there is no fleeing from wrath except by repentance of sin, and by fruits meet for repentance, evidences of a real change of heart and life.

Then John went on to say to the Pharisees and Sadducees that they must *give up all the false hopes which they had cherished:* "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father." Those Pharisees said, in deed, if not in word, "It really does not matter though we do act the hypocrite, for Abraham is our father;" and the Sadducees said, in effect, "Though we are unbelievers, it is of small consequence, for Abraham is our father." "No," answered John, "you must abandon all such false hopes as that." And if any of you, dear friends, have said, "We shall be all right, because we are regular church people;" or if you have said, "We are all right, for we are Baptists, we are Methodists, we are Presbyterians; our father and mother, and our grandfather and grandmother were good Christian people." Ah, yes! and so may your great grandfather and great grandmother have been, but your pedigree will avail you nothing unless you personally quit your sins, and lay hold on Christ as your Saviour. Nor is there anything else upon which you can depend for salvation. Your baptism, your church-going, your chapel-going, your eating of the Lord's supper, your saying of collects, your family prayers, your giving of your guineas, everything of your own put together will all be less than nothing, and vanity, if you trust to it. You must flee away from all such false hopes as that, and get a better hope, even that of which my second text speaks: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

John the Baptist did not tell his hearers all this, for he did not come to preach the gospel to them. He came to preach the law, but he did sufficiently indicate where they must go, for he said to them, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." It is to him, even to Jesus, that you must flee; if you would be saved, you must be among those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you. That is the real refuge for sinners,—the laying hold of Christ, the getting a faith-grip of Jesus as the one atoning sacrifice, the looking to him with tearful but believing eye, and saying, "Jesus, Son of God, I trust in thee; I put myself into thy hands, and leave myself there, that thou mayest deliver me from 'the wrath to come.'"

I pray you, brethren and sisters, wherever you are, you who think you are so good, be anxious to get rid of all that fancied goodness of yours. I beseech you, if you have any self-righteousness about you, to ask God to strip it off you at once, I should like you to feel as that man did, who had a forged bank note and some counterfeit coin in his possession. When the policeman came to his house, he was anxious not to have any of it near him; so, shake off your self-

righteousness. You will be as surely damned by your righteousness, if you trust in it, as you will by your unrighteousness. Christ alone, the gift of the free grace of God, this is the gate of heaven; but all self-satisfaction, all boasting, all exaltation of yourself above your fellow-men, is mischievous and ruinous, and will surely be deadly to your spirit for ever.

How does Christ deliver us from "the wrath to come"? Why, *by putting himself into our place, and putting us into his place.* Oh, this blessed plan of salvation by substitution,—that Christ should take a poor, guilty sinner, and set him up there in the place of acceptance and joy at the right hand of God, and that, in order to be able to do so, Christ should say, "Here comes the great flood of almighty wrath; I will stand just where it is coming, and let it flow over me." And you know that it did overflow him till he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, and more, till he cried aloud, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and still more, till he cried, "It is finished," and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

"He bore, that you might never bear,
His Father's righteous ire;"—

and so, suffering in your stead, and putting you into the place of acceptance which he himself so well deserves to occupy, he saves you from "the wrath to come."

I used to think that, if I once told out this wondrous story of "free grace and dying love," everybody would believe it; but I have long since learned that so hard is the heart of man, that he will sooner be damned than be saved by Christ. Well, you must make your choice, sirs, you must make your choice for yourselves; only do me this one favour, when you have made your choice, do not blame me for having tried to persuade you to act more wisely than I fear your choice will be. I sometimes tremble as I think of the account I have to give in concerning the many thousands who crowd this place to listen to my voice. What if my Master should say to me, at the last, "You flattered them; you tried to run with the times; you did not dare to preach to them the old-fashioned gospel, and to tell them of hell, and of judgment, and of atonement by blood"? No, my Master, thou wilt never be able to say that to me. With all my faults, and infirmities, and imperfections, I have sought to declare thy truth, so far as I knew it, to the sons of men. Therefore, my hearers, I shake my skirts free of your blood. If any one of you shall reject Christ, I will have nothing to do with your damnation. Be spiritual suicides if you will; but I will not be your soul-murderer, nor act like Saul wished his armour-bearer to do when he bade him thrust him through with the sword. I implore you to "flee from the wrath to come." Escape by quitting your sins, and laying hold on Jesus; and do it this very moment, for you may never have another opportunity to do it. May the Lord, of his infinite mercy, grant you grace to trust in Jesus! Amen and Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW III., AND XI. 20—30; AND REVELATION VII. 9—17.

Matthew iii. Verses 1, 2. *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

His was a preparatory ministry; his work was to prepare men's minds for Christ; and never is the heart of man so ready to receive Christ as when it is in a state of repentance. When it is weary of sin, then is it that Christ comes in, and is welcomed by the soul conscious of its guilt, tired of it, and longing to be rid of it.

3, 4. *For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*

Everything about him was impressive, and everything was suitable to the message he had to deliver. He was so dressed as to be noticed at once as a man of ascetic habit. He was not the chaplain of a prince, else would he have been clothed in soft raiment. He was not one who had a gentle message to deliver, else would he not have gone into the wilderness, and summoned the people to come away from their avocations to listen to him. He was the rough pioneer to prepare the way for the King.

5, 6. *Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*

That was his baptism,—a baptism of repentance, and of confession, preparatory to the coming of the Master. See what power there was in John because God was with him. I do not know that he had any remarkable eloquence. Certainly, some things about him were rather repulsive than attractive. But when God is with a man, the people must listen to him. Jerusalem must pour her thousands out of her gates, and the rural districts must yield their hundreds; for if God speaks, no matter by whom, he will have human ears to listen to his voice.

7, 8. *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:*

Answerable to your repentance, congruous therewith, arising out of it, and truly proving its reality.

9, 10. *And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:*

No mere pruning and trimming work did John come to do; he was the handler of a sharp axe that was to fell every worthless tree.

10. *Therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

It is not enough to hew it down. Into the fire it must go; and John minces not his words about the matter, he speaks straight out the message of his Master.

11, 12. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

See the humility of the true servant of Christ. He is not willing even to

exercise the office of a slave, and to carry his Master's shoes, or to unloose the latchet of them. And who among us is worthy to occupy even the lowest office for Christ? There is an honour about it that far transcends any worthiness of ours. To serve him at all, is honour indeed. But, brethren, fix your eyes upon Christ, and recollect what a baptism it is into which he baptizes us;—not with water, but into the Holy Ghost and into fire. Can we bear it? Can we endure the fire? It will only burn up that which ought to be burned; and happy is he to whom God has imparted that eternal life which can never be consumed.

13, 14. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

This is one of the most striking proofs that the ordinance of baptism is not to be neglected by any of Christ's followers, for even he who, in himself, could have had no need for it,—who is himself the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost and with fire, yet comes to the baptizer in water, and asks to be immersed.

15. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*

Nothing that appertains to righteousness must be neglected; the little as well as the great must be observed.

15—17. *Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

This doctrine of repentance was preached by the Master as well as by the servant. Turn to the 11th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, and let us read a few verses, beginning at the 20th.

Matthew xi. Verse 20. *Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:*

They listened; sometimes, they applauded; but they repented not; and there is nothing really accomplished until men have repented. In vain have we preached until men are brought to repent; so the Master said:—

21, 22. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.*

Listen to that, you gospel-hardened sinners, you who have heard, and heard, and heard, but have not repented. See how great is your sin, for you have rejected what others would have received if it had been presented to them. See how your guilt accumulates, and its punishment also.

23, 24. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.*

Sodom!—that is the blackest place of all. Ah, me! will that verse ever fall, like a millstone, upon any one of my hearers, to grind him to powder, because you heard the gospel, and rejected it, intending always to receive it, but never receiving it at all? From such a doom, may God in mercy deliver you!

25—30. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Just by way of contrast to what I am going to say in my sermon, let us read a few verses in Revelation vii.

Rev. vii. Verse 9. *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb,—*

Our numbering can go a very long way, what, therefore, must be the countless hosts of the redeemed who are to be "a great multitude, which no man could number"? And what an infinite variety there will be among them, seeing that they shall not only be "of all nations," but out of those nations they shall be of all "kindreds, and people, and tongues,"—that is, all sorts and conditions of men, of every race, and of every age from the first century down to the last. Christ's immeasurable redemption price must bring to him a great reward. Isaiah long ago foretold that "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied;" and it is no little result that will satisfy him for such travail of soul as he endured.

This great multitude "stood before the throne, and before the Lamb,"—

9. *Clothed with white robes,—*

To set forth their purity, their victory, and their entrance into the marriage state, for such was the colour usually worn on such occasions. "Clothed with white robes," to show that they had entered into their rest, so that their garments were no longer soiled through their toil. They have reached their everlasting Sabbath, their week-day service is over for ever.

9—11. *And palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,*

The angels form the outer ring. The elders, who represent the Church of the redeemed, are nearer to the throne of God than even the holy angels are. Nearest to God in heaven are those who have been redeemed from among men. How high a dignity—how noble an estate—awaits us by-and-by! But, all alike, both saved men and unfallen angels, "fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,"—

12—17. *Saying Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WHY SOME SINNERS ARE NOT PARDONED.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 16TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 30th, 1881.

"And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?"—Job vii. 21.

No man should rest until he is sure that his sin is forgiven. It may be forgiven, and he may be sure that it is forgiven; and he ought not to give rest to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids, till he has been assured, with absolute certainty, that his transgression is pardoned, and that his iniquity is taken away. You, dear friends, may be patient under suffering, but not patient under sin. You may ask for healing with complete resignation to the will of God as to whether he will grant it to you; but you should ask for pardon with importunity, feeling that you must have it. You may not be sure that it is God's will to deliver you from disease, but you may be quite certain that it is his will to hear you when you cry to him to save you from sin. And if, at your first crying unto him, you are not saved, seek to know the reason why he is refusing to grant you the boon you so much desire. It is quite legitimate to put this question to God again and again, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" We ought also to press this matter home upon our own heart and conscience, to see whether we cannot discover the reason why pardon is for a while withheld from us, for God never acts arbitrarily and without reason; and, depend upon it, if we diligently search by the light of the candle of the Lord, we shall be able to find an answer to this question of Job, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" Job's question may sometimes be asked by a child of God; but it may be more frequently asked by others who, as yet, are not brought consciously into the Lord's family.

I. I shall first take our text as A QUESTION THAT MAY BE ASKED, AS IN JOB'S CASE, BY A TRUE CHILD OF GOD: "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?"

Sometimes, beloved friends, this question is asked under a misapprehension. Job was a great sufferer; and although he knew

that he was not as guilty as his troublesome friends tried to make out, yet he did fear that, possibly, his great afflictions were the results of some sin; and, therefore, he came before the Lord with this sorrowful enquiry, "Why dost thou continue to me all this pain and agony? If it be caused by sin, why dost thou not first pardon the sin, and then remove its effects?"

Now I take it that it would have been a misapprehension on Job's part *to suppose that his afflictions were the result of his sin.* Mark you, brethren, we are, by nature, so full of sin that we may always believe that there is enough evil within us to cause us to suffer severe affliction if God dealt with us according to justice; but do recollect that, in Job's case, the Lord's object, in his afflictions and trials, was not to punish Job for his sin, but to display in the patriarch, to his own honour and glory, the wonders of his grace by enabling Job, with great patience, still to hold on to God under the direst suffering, and to triumph in it all. Job was not being punished; he was being honoured. God was giving to him a name like that of the great ones of the earth. The Lord was lifting him up, promoting him, putting him into the front rank, making a great saint of him, causing him to become one of the fathers and patterns in the ancient Church of God. He was really doing for Job such extraordinarily good things that you or I, in looking back upon his whole history, might well say, "I would be quite content to take Job's afflictions if I might also have Job's grace, and Job's place in the Church of God."

It may happen to you, beloved, that you think that your present affliction is the result of some sin in you, yet it may be nothing of the kind. It may be that the Lord loves you in a very special manner because you are a fruit-bearing branch, and he is pruning you that you may bring forth more fruit. As Rutherford said to a dear lady, in his day, who had lost several of her children, "Your ladyship is so sweet to the Well-beloved that he is jealous on your account, and is taking away from you all the objects of your earthly love that he may absorb the affection of your whole heart into himself." It was the very sweetness of the godly woman's character that led her Lord to act as he did towards her, and I believe that there are some of the children of God who are now suffering simply because they are gracious. There are certain kinds of affliction that come only upon the more eminent members of the family of God; and if you are one of those who are thus honoured, instead of saying to your Heavenly Father, "When wilt thou pardon my sin?" you might more properly say, "My Father, since thou hast pardoned mine iniquity, and adopted me into thy family, I cheerfully accept my portion of suffering, since in all this, thou art not bringing to my mind the remembrance of any unforgiven sin, for I know that all my transgressions were numbered on the Scape-goat's head of old. Since thou art not bringing before me any cause of quarrel between myself and thee, for I am walking in the light as thou art in the light, and I have sweet and blessed fellowship with thee, therefore will I bow before thee, and lovingly kiss thy rod, accepting at thy hands whatever thine unerring decree

appoints for me." It is a blessed thing, dear friends, if you can get into this state of mind and heart; and it may happen that your offering of the prayer of the text may be founded upon a complete misapprehension of what the Lord is doing with you.

Sometimes, also, a child of God uses this prayer *under a very unusual sense of sin.* You know that, in looking at a landscape, you may so fix your gaze upon some one object that you do not observe the rest of the landscape. Its great beauties may not be seen by you because you have observed only one small part of it. Now, in like manner, before the observation of the believer, there is a wide range of thought and feeling. If you fix your eye upon your own sinfulness, as you well may do, it may be that you will not quite forget the greatness of almighty love, and the grandeur of the atoning sacrifice; but, yet, if you do not forget them, you do not think so much of them as you should, for you seem to make your own sin, in all its heinousness and aggravation, the central object of your consideration. There are certain times in which you cannot help doing this; they come upon me, so I can speak from my own experience. I find that, sometimes, do what I will, the master-thought in my mind concerns my own sinnership,—my sinnership even since conversion, my shortcomings and my wanderings from my gracious God, and the sins even of my holy things. Well, now, it is well to think of our sin in this way, but it is not well to think of it out of proportion to other things. When I have gone to a physician because I have been ill, I have, of course, thought of my disease; but have I not also thought of the remedy which he will prescribe for me, and of the many cases in which a disease similar to mine has yielded to such a remedy? So, will it not be wrong to fix my thoughts entirely upon one fact to the exclusion of other compensating facts? Yet, that is just how many of us sometimes act, and then we cry to God, as did Job, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" when, indeed, it is already pardoned and taken away. If we try to look at it, there flows before us that sacred stream of our Saviour's atoning blood which covers all our guilt, so that, great though it is, in the sight of God it does not exist, for the precious blood of Jesus has blotted it all out for ever.

There is another time when the believer may, perhaps, utter the question of our text; that is, *whenever he gets into trouble with his God.* You know that, after we are completely pardoned,—as we are the moment we believe in Jesus,—we are no longer regarded as criminals before God; but we become his children. You know that it is possible for a man, who has been brought before the court as a prisoner, to be pardoned; but suppose that, after being forgiven, he should be adopted by him who was his judge, and taken into his family so as to become his child. Now, after doing that, you do not suppose that he will bring him up again before the judgment-seat, and try him, and put him in prison. No; but if he becomes the judge's son, I know what he will do with him; he will put him under the rules of his house, to which all the members of his family are expected to conform. Then, if he misbehaves as a son, there will

not be that freeness of intercourse and communion between himself and his father that there ought to be. At night, the father may refuse to kiss the wayward and disobedient child. When his brethren are enjoying the father's smile, he may have a frown for his portion;—not that the father has turned him out of his family, or made him to be any the less a child than he was, but there is a cloud between them because of his wrongdoing.

I fear, my dear friends, that some of you must have known, at times, what this experience means; for between you and your Heavenly Father—although you are safe enough, and he will never cast you away from him,—there is a cloud. You are not walking in the light, your heart is not right in the sight of God. I would earnestly urge you never to let this sad thing happen; or if it does ever happen, I beg you not to let such a sorrowful state of affairs last for even a day. Settle the quarrel with your God before you go to sleep. Get it put right, as I have seen a child do after he has done wrong. Perhaps he has been pouting and scowling, and his father has had to speak very roughly to him; for a long while, he has been too high-spirited to yield; but, at last, the little one has come, and said, "Father, I was wrong, and I am sorry;" and in that moment there was perfect peace between the two. The father said, "That is all I wanted you to say, my dear child. I loved you even while you were naughty, but I wanted you to feel and own that you were doing wrong; and now that you have felt it, and owned it, the trouble is all over. Come to my bosom, for you are as much loved as all the rest of the family." I can quite imagine that, when any of you have been at cross purposes with God, he has refused, for a time, to give you the sense of his fatherly love in your heart. Then, I beseech you, go to him, and I suggest that you cannot pray to him more appropriately than in the words of the text, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" Or pray, as Job did, a little later, "'Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me,' for I wish to be at peace with thee, and there can be no rest to my new-born spirit while there is any cause of quarrel between us."

Thus far have I spoken to the children of God. Now I ask for your earnest prayers that I may be guided to speak wisely and powerfully to others.

II. THE QUESTION IN OUR TEXT MAY BE ASKED BY SOME WHO ARE NOT CONSCIOUSLY GOD'S CHILDREN: "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?"

And, first, I think that I hear somebody making this kind of enquiry, "*Why does not God pardon my sin, and have done with it?* When I come to this place, I hear a great deal about atonement by blood, and reconciliation through the death of Christ; but why does not God just say to me, 'It is true that you have done wrong, but I forgive you, and there is an end of the matter'?" With the utmost reverence for the name and character of God, I must say that such a course of action is impossible. God is infinitely just and holy, he is the Judge of all the earth, and he must punish sin. You know, dear friends, that there are times, even in the history

of earthly kingdoms, when the rulers say, by their actions, if not in words, "There is sedition abroad, but we will let it go on; we do not want to seem severe, so we will not strike the rebels down." What is sure to be the consequence of such conduct? Why, the evil grows worse and worse; the rebellious men presume upon the liberty allowed them, and take still more liberty; and, unless the law-giver intends that his law shall be kicked about the street like a football, unless he means that the peace and safety of his law-abiding subjects should be absolutely destroyed, he is at last obliged to act; and he says, "No; this state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. I shall be cruel to others unless I draw the sword, and make justice to be respected throughout my realm."

I tell you, dear friends, that the most awful thing in the universe would be a world full of sin, and yet without a hell for its punishment. The most dreadful condition for any people to be in is that of absolute anarchy, when every man does what he pleases, and law has become utterly contemptible. Now, if, after men had lived lives of ungodliness and sin, of which they had never repented, and from the guilt of which they had never been purged, God were just quietly to take them to heaven, there would be an end of all moral government, and heaven itself would not be a place that anybody need wish to go to. If ungodly people went there in the same state as they are in here, heaven would become a sort of ante-chamber of hell, a respectable place of damnation; but that can never be the case. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He has devised a wondrous plan by which he can pardon the guilty without to the slightest degree shaking the foundations of his throne, or endangering his government. Will you be saved in that way, or not? If you reject God's way of salvation, you must be lost, and the blame must lie at your own door. God will not permit anarchy in order that he may indulge your whims, or vacate the throne of heaven that he may save you according to your fancy. At the infinite expense of his heart's love, by the death of his own dear Son, he has provided a way of salvation; and if you reject that, you need not ask Job's question, for you know why he does not pardon your transgression, and take away your iniquity; and upon your own head shall lie the blood of your immortal soul.

Perhaps somebody else says "Well, then, if that is God's way of salvation, let us believe in Jesus Christ, and let us have pardon at once. *But you talk about the need of a new birth*, and about forsaking sin, and following after holiness, and you say that without holiness no man can see the Lord." Yes, I do say it, for God's Word says it; and I repeat that, for God to give pardon, and then allow men to go on in sin just as they did before, would be a curse to them instead of a blessing. Why, if the dishonest man prospers in the world, is that a blessing to him? No, certainly not; for he only becomes the more dishonest. If a man commits licentiousness, and he escapes the consequences of it in this life, is that a blessing to him? No; for he becomes the more licentious; and if God did not punish men for their sin, but permitted them to be happy in the sin, it would be a greater curse to them than for him to

come and say to them, "For every transgression of my righteous law, there shall be due punishment; and for all moral evil there shall also be physical evils upon those who commit it." I thank God that he does not permit sin to produce happiness; I bless him that he puts punishment at the back of evil, for so it ought to be. The curse of sin is in the evil itself rather than in its punishment; and if it could become a happy thing for a man to be a sinner, then men would sin, and sin again, and sin yet more deeply; and this God will not have.

"Well," says another friend, "that is not my trouble. I am willing to be saved by the atonement of Christ, and I am perfectly willing to be made to cease from sin, and to receive from God a new heart and a right spirit; why, then, does he not pardon me, and blot out my transgressions?" Well, it may be, first, *because you have not confessed your wrongdoing.* You remember that the apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Do you ask, "To whom shall I confess my sins?" Shall you come to me with your confession? Oh, no, no, no! I could not stand that. There is an old proverb about a thing being "as filthy as a priest's ear." I cannot imagine anything dirtier than that, and I have no wish to be a partaker in the filthiness. Go to God, and confess your sin to him; pour out your heart's sad story in the ear of him against whom you have offended; say, with David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Dear anxious friend, if you say to me, "For months I have sought the Lord, and I cannot find him, or get peace of conscience;" I advise you to try the effect of this plan, shut yourself up in your room alone, and make a detailed confession of your transgression. Perhaps confessing it in the bulk may have helped you to be hypocritical; so try and confess it in detail, especially dwelling upon those grosser sins which most provoke God, and most defile the conscience, even as David prayed, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God." That was his great crime; he had been the cause of the death of Uriah, so he confessed that he was guilty of blood, and prayed to be delivered from it. In like manner, confess your sin, whatever it has been. I am persuaded that, often, confession to God would relieve the soul of its load of guilt. Just as when a man has a gathering tumour, and a wise physician lets in the lancet, and that which had gathered is removed, and the inflammation subsides, so often would it be with what the conscience has gathered if, by confession, the heart were lanced, and the accumulated evil dispersed. How can we expect God to give rest to our conscience if we will not confess to him our sin?

May it not be possible, also, dear friends who cannot obtain pardon and peace, that *you are still practising some known sin?* Now, your Heavenly Father means to give you mercy in a way that shall be for your permanent benefit. What are you doing that is wrong? I do not know you so intimately as to be able to tell what is amiss with you; but I have known a man who never could get peace with God because he had a quarrel with his brother, and as he would not forgive his brother, it was not reasonable that he

should expect to receive forgiveness from God. There was another man, who sought the Lord for a long while, but he never could get peace for this reason; he was a travelling draper, and he had what was supposed to be a yard measure, but it was not full length; and, one day, during the sermon, he took up his short measure in the place of worship, and just snapped it across his knee, and then he found peace with God directly he gave up that which had been the means of wrongdoing. He had sought for pardon in vain all the while that he had persevered in evil; but as soon as that was given up, the Lord whispered peace to his soul. Do any of you take "a drop too much" at home? Is that your besetting sin? I mean women as well as men when I ask that question. You smile at the suggestion, but it is no laughing matter, for it is only too true that many, who are never suspected of such a thing, are guilty of drinking to excess. Now it may be that there will never be peace between God and your soul until that glass goes. It will have to go if God is to forgive your sin; so the sooner it goes, the better will it be for you. Perhaps, in your case, the sin is that you do not manage your families right. Are your children never checked when they do wrong? Are they, in fact, allowed to grow up to be children of the devil? Do you expect God and you to be agreed while it is so? Think what a quarrel God had with his servant Eli over that matter, and remember how that quarrel ended, because Eli mildly said to his sons, "Why do ye such things?" but restrained them not when they made themselves vile. Look, dear friends. God will not save us because of our works; salvation is entirely by grace, but then that grace shows itself by leading the sinner upon whom it is bestowed to give up the sin in which he had formerly indulged. Which, then, will you have,—your sin or your Saviour? Do not try to hold sin with one hand, and the Saviour with the other, for they cannot both of them be yours; so choose which you will have. I pray that God may discover to you what is the sin which is keeping you from peace, and then grant to you the grace to give it up.

"Well," say you, "I do not know that this is my case at all, for I really do, from my heart, endeavour to give up all sin, and I am sincerely seeking peace with God." Well, friend, perhaps you have not found it *because you have not been thoroughly earnest in seeking it.* You seem to be in earnest while you are here on a Sunday night, but how earnest are you on Monday night? Perhaps you are fairly so then because you come to the prayer-meeting, but how about Tuesday, and Wednesday, and the rest of the week? When a man really wants to have his soul saved, he should let everything else go until he gets that all-important matter settled. Yes, I will venture to say as much as that. Recollect what the woman of Samaria did when she had received Christ's word at the well at Sychar. She had gone to the well for water; but look at her as she goes back to the city. Is there any waterpot on her head? No; the woman left her waterpot, she forgot what had been to her a necessary occupation when once she had been brought seriously to think about her soul and her Saviour. I do not want

you to forget that, when you have found Christ, you can carry your waterpot, and yet cleave to Christ; but, until you have really received him by faith, I should like to see you so fully absorbed in the pursuit of the one thing needful that everything else should be put into the second place, or even lower than that; and if you were to say, "Until I am saved, I will do absolutely nothing; I will get me to my chamber, and I will cry to God for mercy, and from that room I will never come until he blesses me," I would not charge you with fanaticism, nor would anybody else who knew the relative value of eternal things and things of time and sense. Why, man, in order to save your coat, would you throw away your life? "Nay," you would say; "the coat is but a trifle compared with my life." Well, then, as your life is of more value than your coat, and as your soul is of more value than your body, and as the first thing you need is to get your sin forgiven that your soul may be saved, until that is done, everything else may well be let go. God give you such desperate earnestness that you must and will have the blessing! When you reach that resolve, you shall have it; when you cannot take a denial from God, you shall not have a denial.

There is still one thing more that I will mention as a reason why some men do not find the Saviour, and get their sins forgiven; and that is, *because they do not get off the wrong ground on to the right ground.* If you are ever to be pardoned, dear friend, it must be entirely by an act of divine, unmerited favour. Now perhaps you are trying to do something to recommend yourself to God; you would scout with derision the doctrine of being saved by your own merits; but, still, you have a notion that there is something or other in you that is to recommend you to God in some measure or degree, and you still think that the ground of your forgiveness must lie to some extent with yourself. Well, now, you never can have forgiveness in that way. Salvation must be all of works, or else all of grace. Are you willing to be saved as a guilty, hell-deserving sinner,—as one who does not deserve salvation, but, on the contrary, deserves to endure the wrath of God? Are you willing that, henceforth, it shall be said, "That man was freely forgiven all his trespasses, not for his own sake, but for Christ's sake alone"? That is good ground for you to stand upon; that is solid rock. But some men seem to get one foot upon the rock, and they say, "Yes, salvation comes by Christ." Where is that other foot of yours, my friend? Oh! he says that he has been baptized, or that he has been confirmed, or that he has in some way or other done something in which he can trust. Now, all such reliance as that is simply resting on sand; and however firmly your other foot may be planted on the rock, you will go down if this foot is on sand. You need good standing for both your feet, dear friends; and see that you get it. Let this be your language,—

> **"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;**
> **More than all in thee I find."**

Do not look anywhere else for anyone or anything that can save you; but look to Christ, and to Christ alone. Are you too proud

to do that? You will have to humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God, and the sooner you do so, the better will it be for you. "Oh, but I, I,—I must surely do something!" Listen,—

"Till to Jesus' work you cling
By a simple faith,
'Doing' is a deadly thing,
'Doing' ends in death.

"Cast your deadly 'doing' down,
Down at Jesus' feet,
Stand in *him*, in *him alone*,
Gloriously complete!"

This is the gospel: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." You will never see up in heaven a sign bearing the names "Christ and Co." No, it is Christ, and Christ alone, who is the sinner's Saviour. He claims this for himself: "I am Alpha and Omega;" that is, "I am A, and I am Z. I am the first letter of the alphabet, and I am the last letter, and I am every other letter from the first down to the last." Will you make him to be so to you, dear friend? Will you take him to be your Saviour now? "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." A friend told us, at one of our prayer-meetings, that "H-A-T-H spells got it." "He that believeth on the Son" is a saved sinner, he has got that everlasting life that can never die, and can never be taken away from him. Therefore, beloved friends, believe in Jesus, and you too shall have this eternal life, you shall have pardon, you shall have peace, you shall have God, and you shall have heaven itself to enjoy before long. God do so unto you, for his great mercy's sake in Christ Jesus! Amen and Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOB VII., AND JOHN III., 14—17.

Job was sorely troubled by the cruel speeches of his friends, and he answered them out of the bitterness of his soul. What we are first about to read is a part of his language under those circumstances.

Job vii. Verse 1. *Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?*

Is there not a certain time for each one of us to live? Is there not an end to all the trouble and sorrow of this mortal state? "Woe is me," says Job, "will this sad condition of things never come to a close? Must it always be thus with me?"

2. *As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow,—*

When the day shall close, and he can go to his home,—

2, 3. *And as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: so am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.*

If that is the case with any of you, dear friends, you ought to be comforted by the thought that a better man than you are underwent just what you are enduring, and underwent it so as to glorify God by it. Remember what the apostle James wrote, "Behold, we count them happy

which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." But if our case is not so bad as Job's was, if we are in good health, and surrounded by God's mercy, let us be very grateful. Every morning that you wake after a refreshing night's rest, praise God for it, for it might have been far otherwise, for you might have had wearisome nights through pain and suffering.

4, 5. *When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome.*

Such was the dreadful disease under which this man of God laboured, for the worst of pain may happen to the best of men. Sometimes, God ploughs his best fields most; and why should he not do so? Do not men try to do most with that which will yield most? And so God may most chasten those who will best repay the strokes of his hand. It is no token of displeasure when God smites us with disease; it may be an evidence that we are branches of the vine that bring forth fruit, or else he would not have taken the trouble to prune us.

6. *My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.*

His spirits had sunk so low that he had not any hope at all left;—at least, there was none apparent just then. O you poor tried children of God, I beseech you once again to see that you are only walking where others have gone before you! Mark their footprints, and take heart again.

7, 8. *O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good. The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.*

As if God only looked at him, and the very look withered him; or as if there was only time for God just to look at him, and then he disappeared as though he had been but a dream, an unsubstantial thing. It is good, my brethren, sometimes to know what vanities we are; and if we complain that things around us are vanity, what are we ourselves but the shadows of a shade?

9—12. *As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?*

Am I such a big thing, such a dangerous thing, that I ought to be watched like this, and perpetually hampered, and tethered, and kept within bounds? Ah, no! Job, you are neither a sea nor a whale, but something worse than either of them. So are we all,—more false than the treacherous sea, harder to be tamed than the wildest of God's creatures. God does set a watch over us, and well he may. But hear Job's complaint:—

13—15. *When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life.*

Were you ever in this terrible place, dear friend? Some of us have been there, and we have used the very language of Job; and yet, for all that, we have been brought up again out of the utmost depths of despondency into the topmost heights of joy. Therefore, be comforted, ye poor prisoners. Through the bars and grating of your soul-dungeon, we would sing unto you this song,—the Lord, that has brought us forth, can bring you forth also, for "the Lord looseth the prisoners." The God of Job is

yet alive, strong as ever for the deliverance of such as put their trust in him.

16, 17. *I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity. What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?*

Job seems to say, "I am too little for God to notice me; why does he make so much of me as to chasten me so sorely?"

18, 19. *And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment? How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?*

Blow followed blow in quick succession. Pain came fast upon the heels of pain till Job seems to have had no rest from his anguish. This is the mournful moaning of a man on a sick-bed, worn out with long-continued grief. Do not judge it harshly. You may have to use such words yourself, one day; and if you ever do, then judge not yourself hardly, but say, "I am only now where that eminent servant of God, the patriarch Job, once was, and the Lord who delivered him will also deliver me."

20. *I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?*

We did not expect him to call God by that name; yet sorrow hath a quick memory to recall anything by which it may be cheered. "Thou Preserver of men," says Job, "I have sinned: what shall I do?"

20. *Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee,*

"Drawing thy bow, and directing all thine arrows against my poor heart. Hast thou no butts that thou must needs make me thy target, and test thy holy archery upon me?"

20. *So that I am a burden to myself?*

Oh, what heavy words, "a burden to myself"!

21. *And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.*

Speaking after the manner of man, he seems to think that, if God does not pardon him soon, the pardon will come too late; for if God comes in mercy by-and-by, he will be dead and gone, and God may seek him, but he shall not be found. This is how men talk when they get a little off their head through the very extremity of grief. We, too, may perhaps talk in the same fashion, one day, so let us not condemn poor Job.

Now let us read a few verses in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel according to John, that we may be comforted. If any of you are labouring under a sense of sin, I would take you straight away to sin's only cure.

John iii. Verses 14, 15. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

"Whosoever." Note that word, for it means you, and it means me. No matter though you are near to death's door, crushed and broken, bruised and mangled, look to the Crucified One, and, looking, you shall find that there is life eternal for you. Though your soul has been ready to choose strangling rather than your life, yet there is a better life for you by trusting in Christ. Choose that, and rest in him. Say, from your heart, the last lines of the hymn we sang just now,—

"Jesus, to thy arms I fly;
Save me, Lord, or else I die."

16, 17. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

Now this, which is good teaching for those who have but lately come to Christ, or for those who are seeking to come to him, is the very same teaching which will bring comfort to the most advanced and best instructed of the saints. How I love continually to begin with Christ over again as I began at the first! They say, when a man is sick, that it is a good thing to take him to his native place, and when a true believer's soul gets faint and unbelieving, let him breathe the air of Calvary over again. The learned Grotius, who had spent the most of his life in theological disputations,—not always or yet often on the right side,—when he was dying said, "Read me something;" and they read him the story of the publican and the Pharisee. He said, "And that poor publican I am; thank God, that publican I am. 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" That was the word with which the great scholar entered into heaven, and that is the way in which you and I must come to God. May the Holy Spirit help us all to come to him thus! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—296, 606, 607.

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With the January number of "The Sword and the Trowel," which will be published before Christmas, Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster will present, as a Memento of the Re-opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, a fine Photo Reproduction, on plate paper 20 by 15 inches, showing the interior of the Tabernacle at the Opening Services, with Mr. Sankey, together with Pastor Thomas Spurgeon and the Church Officers.

Among other items of interest in the January Magazine will be a notable early Sermon by C. H. SPURGEON; the first of a series of papers by Pastor Hugh D. Brown, M.A., of Dublin, entitled "Semper Idem" (God's Witness to His own Word); an article by Pastor Thomas Spurgeon on "The Sword and Trowel in the New Century;" the first of a series of papers by Pastor J. E. Walton on "Bush Life in Tasmania;" and the beginning of H. T. S.'s "Diary of a Puritan Gentleman in the Reign of Queen Anne and George I."

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FEEDING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 23RD, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, November 6th, 1881.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life."—John vi. 47, 48.

OBSERVE carefully the order in which our Lord puts the two blessings he mentions;—first, life through believing on him, and then food to sustain that life;—first, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life;" and next to that, "I am that bread of life." Life comes first, and food follows afterwards. It is impossible for a dead man to feed, or to be fed; only the living can eat and drink. I once went into the monastery of the Capuchins at Rome, and there I saw certain of the departed brotherhood dressed in their regular habits, although they had been dead, some of them a hundred years, some fifty, and one gentleman, I think, had scarcely been dead more than a year or so; but there they sat, with their breviaries in their hands, just as if they had been alive; yet I did not see any preparations for feeding them. It would have been as ridiculous to attempt to feed them as it was to keep them there at all.

Now, when we preach the gospel, unless you have spiritual life, you cannot feed upon it; and if you were to come to the communion table, unless you were truly alive unto God, you might eat the bread, and drink the wine, but with real spiritual food, the body of Christ, and the blood of Christ, you could have nothing to do. We do not give food to people in order to make them live. That would be a useless experiment; but, because they are alive, they take food in order to sustain and nourish the life which is already in them. Always recollect, dear friends, that the best spiritual food in the world is useless to those who are spiritually dead; and one very essential part of the gospel is that truth which our Saviour so plainly taught, "Ye must be born again." All attempts at feeding the soul are of no use until the new birth has been experienced; even that precious, priceless bread of life cannot be assimilated unless the soul has been quickened by the Spirit of God.

Judge, then, my hearers, whether you are alive unto God, or not. Before you can rightly know the truth, before you are qualified to learn its mysteries, pray that you may be made to live by faith in Jesus Christ; for before food comes life.

But, next, after life there must be food; for, just as surely as there will be no use for the food without the life, so will there be no continuance of the life without the food. Men have played great pranks with themselves, and have even experimented upon the possibility of living for forty days without food,—an experiment which I, for one, have no kind of wish to imitate; neither would I recommend any of my hearers to attempt it, for the probability is that, if one man should manage to survive his forty days' fast, there will be forty other men, who try to do the same, who will be in another world long before the end of that time. God meant us to eat if we wish to live. When he made men and women, he made the fruits of the earth on which they should feed, and afterwards he gave them the flesh of beasts that they might feed thereon; but they must be fed if they are to continue to exist. So is it with the soul; and the soul must be fed on spiritual meat. Souls cannot eat what bodies can eat; but, still, they must eat; all the qualities, in a spiritual man, which are gracious, need food. Faith needs truth to believe. Love needs a revelation of love to keep it burning. Hope needs to be reminded of the things to be expected in the future, so that it may continue to hope; and every grace within a spiritual man is clamorous for spiritual food that it may feed upon. If there are any of you, who profess to be spiritual men, and yet you say that you can live without reading the Bible, without attending the house of prayer, without any outward means of grace, all I can say is that I do not want to try your system of living, for I should be starved by it if you are not; and I would not recommend any Christian man to try to see how long his spirit can live without spiritual food. No; our Lord's order is, first, life; then, food; and this implies that, where there is life, there must be food. Those two things are very simple, yet many persons live as if they did not know them.

Next, if you look at the text, you will see that there is everlastingness in the life: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life;" yet there is need of food all the same. The everlastingness of the life does not militate against the fact of its need of spiritual food, for here the two things are put side by side: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life." The life of the believer is everlasting, yet it needs food to sustain it. Does any one of you say, "God has saved me, the Holy Spirit has quickened me, and I shall never perish; therefore I need not feed upon the Word, I need not be watchful, I need not be careful"? My dear friend, you do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the analogy of faith. It is quite certain that those whom Christ has quickened by his Spirit shall never die; but it is just as certain that they would die if they did not feed upon Christ, and sustain their life by that means; the two things are not contrary the one to the other. I charge you, beloved, to be as

vigilant in the keeping of yourselves as if you were really your own keepers. Be as earnest that you slip not with your feet as if there were no promise that God would keep the feet of his saints. Be as diligent in prayer and holy living as if everything depended upon yourself. Yet forget not to fall back upon the grand truth that, after all, your safety does not depend upon yourself, but it rests in the hands of him who has undertaken to keep you from falling, and to preserve you even to the end. Your new life is everlasting, yet you must feed it.

Now think for a minute or two of the converse of that truth. Because your new life must feed,—which is clear from the text, where Christ says, "I am that bread of life,"—do not therefore infer that your life is not everlasting. All the precepts of the Word of God which admonish us to persevere are consistent with the fact that the saints shall persevere. All the exhortations to feed on spiritual food are quite consistent with the blessed fact that you shall so feed, and that, so feeding, your souls shall live for ever. Has not a man two eyes? Surely it is that he may see the whole of a truth, and not merely one side of it. I believe that some people fall into great mischief because they shut one eye, and never will open it; and if anybody tries to point out the other side of truth, they cry, "Oh, he is not sound!" But, my dear friend, for my part, I am always quite satisfied when I have the Scriptures at the back of my teaching. I do not care even the snap of a finger for what you may call unsound, or what anybody else may call unsound, so long as it is in accordance with the Word of God. And you may depend upon this fact, that paradoxes are not strange things in Scripture, but are rather the rule than the exception. Very often, those things which appear to contradict each other are only two sides of the same truth, and he who would get at the truth itself must look at them both, and follow them both. If you are Christ's sheep, you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hands; yet it is to you that such a warning as this is addressed, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God;" and it is to you that the injunction is given, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" and while labouring for it, bless God that you have it already, seeing that you have Christ in your possession, and he says, "I am that bread of life."

Notice, brethren, how Jesus Christ, our Divine Lord and Master, is everything to his people. Our life, that is Christ: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Our food for that life: that also is Christ: "I am that bread of life." I have come even to love my own necessities, for they seem to be like pedestals whereon the image of Christ may stand. If I did not need Christ, how could he be my life? If I did not need food to sustain that life, how could he be the bread of life to me? But the greater my necessities, the deeper is my sense of his fulness. The more I become dependent upon him for everything, the more I see of his all-sufficiency. You know that, if there were no great

hollows and deep places on the face of the earth, there would be no room for the seas and oceans; and if there were no deep places in our soul's need, where could be the fulness, the manifested fulness, of the Lord Jesus Christ? Rejoice, then, my brother, that Christ made you alive from the dead, and then raise another song of thanksgiving because he keeps you alive. Bless his name for grafting you into the vine, and then bless him for every drop of sap as it comes flowing out of him, the stem, into you, the branch. Christ is all; Christ is all; Christ is all; and to his name be praise for ever and ever.

Perhaps someone asks, "How do we feed on Jesus Christ?" and there are some who say that we feed upon Christ in what is called "the sacrament." I do not like that word "sacrament" as applied to the ordinance of the Lord's supper; at all events, there is no mention in Scripture of such a thing as a "sacrament." It is an old heathenish word, applying to the oath which a soldier swore to be faithful to his commander. I like neither swearing nor sacraments, and I do not like either one of them any more than the other, for both of them are contrary to the Word of God. Out of that word "sacrament" a great mass of mischief has grown up; it is a bed of rottenness out of which all sorts of evil fungi have sprung. Let us keep clear of that once for all.

Some men tell us, however, that, in what they call "the sacrament of holy communion," the communicants feed upon Christ. Listen. My text was spoken by Christ before the Lord's supper had been instituted: a long while before he broke the bread, and poured out the wine, as a memorial of his death, he had uttered these remarkable words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." But there was spiritual life in the apostles, even then, was there not? Yet they had never eaten of what is called the sacrament, for it was not instituted at that time. As there was true life in them, they must have eaten of Christ; and there being no Lord's supper then instituted, it is clear that there is a way of eating of Christ's flesh, and drinking of his blood, altogether apart from the communion.

Now, having said so much by way of correcting a common error, I want you just as clearly to understand that the Lord's supper, as afterwards instituted, was manifestly intended by Christ to be a picture, setting forth, by outward and visible signs, the way of feeding upon him. It is not actually feeding upon Christ, for that took place before there was any Lord's supper; but it is an admirable picture of that feeding upon Christ; and to all time it remains one of the choicest methods—*one* method only, mark you,—one of the choicest methods by which spiritually-quickened souls are helped to feed upon Christ. We often feed upon Christ while hearing sermons. We feed upon Christ as we read good books. We feed upon Christ in the public prayers of the sanctuary, and in the secret communion in our own chamber. If we are as we should be, we are always feeding upon Christ; and part of the meaning of that petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," is, "Give us

this day to feed upon Christ." Though we come to no communion table, much less approach an altar of sacrifice, we are spiritually and really fed upon Christ in other ways. Still, again I say that this communion service is a very choice way of feeding upon Christ; and I want to try to show you, by this picture, how it is that souls feed spiritually upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a picture of how souls receive spiritual life. The Lord's supper is a picture of how that new life is sustained. Both ordinances are only pictures, symbols, emblems,—nothing more. Our immersion, by its symbolic representation of death, and burial, and rising again out of the water, sets forth how we live by dying to all but Christ, and rise again to live in Christ in newness of life. That is the beginning of the new life; and then comes the Lord's supper as a picture of how the soul feeds upon the body and blood of Christ. Baptism is the door of the house, and the communion is a meal in the inner chamber for those who have been raised from the dead, and quickened into life in Christ Jesus. Do not imagine —I do not suppose that I have a single hearer who does think so,— but do not imagine that there is any magic in baptism, by which water makes men, women, or children, into children of God, heirs of Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; and do not suppose either that there is any magic about bread and wine,— wafers and wine and water I think some use,—but do not suppose for a moment that there is any magic in them; they are merely pictures setting forth important truths, for souls cannot eat bread, souls cannot drink "the fruit of the vine." What are these emblems and symbols here for? Only as helps to thought, reminders of certain great facts, memorials of wondrous deeds which are brought to our recollection, so that our memories, and through them our souls, may feed upon these great truths.

Now, after this unusually lengthy preface, which seemed to be necessary to the full understanding of our subject, I want to point out to you the picture, which the Lord's supper sets before us, of our feeding upon the bread of life.

I. And, first, WE FEED NOT WITHOUT A BLESSING. In coming to the communion table, the first thing we do is to give thanks,—to ask a blessing,—the blessing of God upon the sacred feast. Now, soul, if you are really alive unto God by Jesus Christ, you cannot feed upon Christ without the divine blessing. As you could not, at the first, come to Christ without the Father's drawing, so you cannot even now feed upon Christ without the Holy Ghost's divine assistance. If I were to sit down, and say, "I am going to feed upon Christ," and opened at the very sweetest chapter in the whole Bible, I might read it through, and yet not be feeding on Christ at all. If I were to say, "I will get to my knees, and in my chamber I will enter into fellowship with Christ, and spiritually eat his flesh, and drink his blood," I might keep on my knees till they ached, but, apart from the blessing of God, I should get no good out of the action. So, first, when we come to this communion table, we ask God to bless what we are about to do; for, unless he shall draw us, we shall not be able to run after him; unless he shall

open our mouth, we shall not be fed with the bread of heaven. I charge you, therefore, O beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, whose hearts are longing for communion with the Well-beloved, ask your Heavenly Father, by the effectual working of his blessed Spirit, to visit you with power, and life, and blessing! When you open the Bible, let it be with this prayer upon your lip: "Quicken thou me, O Lord, according unto thy Word!" When you draw near to God in private devotion, let it be in complete dependence upon the Spirit of God. When you listen to sermons, when you come to the communion table, let it always be with the glance to heaven for the blessing of the Lord to rest upon it all, for all is nothing unless God shall bless it to you.

II. Secondly, WE FEED ON JESUS DEAD FOR US. The blessing is asked, now what follows at the communion? Why, next, bread is taken, and broken. That bread is the emblem of the body of Christ. But what is that wine cup? It is the emblem of the blood of Christ. So, you see, we have flesh there without blood, and blood there as it were drained out of the flesh. What do the two emblems together make up? Why, *death*. If we were to dip the bread in the wine, it would be no proper observance of the Lord's supper; but these two emblems are separate, the one from the other, because they are intended to symbolize to us the death of Christ. Now, brothers and sisters, the food of your faith is to be found in the death of the Lord Jesus for you; and, oh, what blessed food it is! Some of us know what it is to be bowed down in despondency almost to despair; and I, for one, bear my testimony that, under such circumstances, nothing revives me like a sight of my Master on the accursed tree. Unless he died for me, I, for one, am lost eternally. I can see no merits of my own, which I dare present to God; for I am a mass of sin, and I should be a mass of misery, were it not for those dear wounds of his, and that bloody sweat, that cross and passion.

Think much of this great central truth of the atonement, for it is the food of your soul. The bread and the wine cannot spiritually feed you; all they can do is to help you to remember the sufferings and death of Jesus; and, by remembering them, to show forth his death "till he come." It is in this way that your faith is nourished, your hope is nourished, your love is nourished, your whole soul is nourished in every gracious and holy way. Read the life of Christ as recorded by the four Evangelists, but feed most on the death of Christ. Study the example of Christ, yet that is not your meat; let your meat be his body broken for your sake, his blood poured out in grievous agony, even unto death, as atonement for your sin. The Lord's supper is a very beautiful and impressive method of instruction to us because, as there we have to feed upon emblems which set forth a cruel death, so our souls must feed, by contemplation, upon the real death of Christ, and all good things within us must be sustained by faith in that death.

III. Now we will go a step further,—WE FEED UPON CHRIST BY RECEIVING HIM SPIRITUALLY INTO US. We have looked at what is on the table; the next thing, in order to celebrate the Lord's supper,

is that we must eat, and we must drink. It would be no observance of the supper if I were to break the bread, and leave it on the table, or if the wine in the cup should stand there simply to be looked at. No; the bread must be eaten, the wine must be drunk. Learn, hence, that if your soul is to be fed, you must take Christ into you; you must not merely think of him as belonging to somebody else, but as your own Saviour, whose death was in your stead, who loved you, and gave himself for you. Make bold, by faith, to cry, as Thomas did, not only "Lord and God," but "My Lord, and my God." Say, "In this blood, which he shed, I wash away my sin. This body of his, which he gave to death, he gave up for me; and in his sufferings my heart confides because these sufferings were endured for me."

It is palpable to everyone that there is no feeding of the body by just rubbing a loaf of bread outside of it. You have to break up the loaf, and to get it into yourself; and there is no feeding the spirit by merely believing the doctrines of the Word, and knowing the facts of the gospel; you must accept him who is the very essence of the doctrines, you must receive him to whom all the facts relate; you must, indeed, by faith take Jesus Christ into yourself. O beloved, this is the way to feed on Christ! Your new life will be vigorous enough, and strong enough, when this is the case with you.

IV. Further, WE FEED UPON CHRIST BY DELIBERATE THOUGHT. I remind you that, in the eating and the drinking at the Lord's supper, there is much deliberation to be manifested, it is not a helter-skelter rush, and a hurried feeding. There are two signs, two symbols, both of which very wonderfully represent Christ's suffering. I have often sketched for you the process by which we get our bread; it is very significant and instructive. The wheat is taken, and cast into the ground, and buried. It is subject to frost and snow, and all manner of ills. It springs up; it grows; it ripens. Then comes the sickle, and it is cut down. Being cut down, it is carried away upon the loaded wain, and thrown upon the threshing floor. Then it is beaten with the flail till each grain of wheat is separated from the straw. Then the wheat is taken, and put into the mill, and in the mill it is ground to fine flour. Nor have its pangs and tortures ended yet. It is made into dough, and kneaded; and then it must go into the oven to be baked. Through all sorts of painful processes it must go till it finishes up with being broken to pieces, and with being ground between the teeth of the eater. In this way, it becomes a most significant symbol of the sufferings of Christ. His life is, all through, a story of griefs: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;" and you and I are to think over that history of Christ with due deliberation and care as we ponder the symbolism of the broken bread. Then comes the cup. Here, the grape has been crushed in the winepress till its ruddiest juice has been poured forth, its very heart's blood being shed beneath the extreme pressure. This is another picture of Christ's suffering,—of his suffering even unto death. So the one picture has two panels, and many subdivisions, as if the Lord would say to us, "If you want to feed your soul

upon Christ, you must think a great deal about him. You must not merely say, by faith, 'Yes, Christ is my Saviour.' That is well, so far as it goes; that truth will give you life; but you must see who he was, and what he was, and what he did, and why he did it, and what he is doing now, and what he has yet to do; and so, by taking it in detail, you will feed your soul very wonderfully." Look at many half-starved Christians. Why! you can see each rib, you may tell each bone in their spiritual anatomy. They have scarcely enough life to be able to sing in a whisper,—

> "'Tis a point I long to know,
> Oft it causes anxious thought,
> 'Do I love the Lord, or no?
> Am I his, or am I not?'"

Now, if they thought more of Christ,—if they broke up the truth about him more than they do,—if they looked more into his passion,—if they studied his wondrous person,—if they relied upon his promises,—if they rested in his work more in detail by contemplation, they would grow to be spiritual giants, they would be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

Is there not much instructive teaching, then, in this supper, as far as we have gone? But, I want you, dear friends, to notice that every point about the Lord's supper is full of gracious spiritual meaning.

V. Next, WE FEED UPON CHRIST BY RECEIVING THE COVENANT. When the Lord Jesus Christ passed the cup to his disciples, he said to them, "This cup is the new testament (that is, covenant,) in my blood, which is shed for you." Hark to the word "covenant, covenant." Brothers and sisters, are you very hungry? Do your souls want the richest food that God himself can give you? I will tell you of a cupboard where there is locked up bread such as they never ate in the wilderness; it is better even than the manna. Take your Bible, and go through its many chambers, and up and down the corridors of its wondrous teaching, and you will see, over one coffer that stands there, this word, in golden letters, "covenant." That is the place where God specially meets with his people. "He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant." The man who can fully understand the word "covenant" is a theologian. That is the key of all theology,—the covenant of works by which we fell, and the covenant of grace by which we stand, Christ fulfilling the covenant for us as our Surety and Representative, fulfilling it by the shedding of his blood, which is typified by the cup, and so leaving for us a covenant wholly fulfilled on our side, which is Christ's side, and only to be fulfilled now by God. And what God has to fulfil is this promise of the covenant: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. . . . And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Ah, brethren! this is what we call "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Some of our fellow-Christians have very poor spiritual digestion; they cannot feed upon this sort of food. When they try to partake of it, they fancy that it is too rich for them, so they say, "It cannot be good food for souls." Ay, but there are some of us who, by reason of age and use, have had our senses exercised, and we have grown old enough now to digest the strong meat of the gospel, and we are glad to get our teeth into it whenever we can. I like to go down to the covenant storehouse, and to lay hold of these blessed things; and I urge you, brethren and sisters, to do the same. If you want really to feed your soul, take care that you try to understand the covenant, for the Lord Jesus gives you a hint that there the richest wine is found by saying, as he was passing the cup, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

VI. Yet again, WE FEED UPON CHRIST AS WE SIT AROUND HIS TABLE. To my mind. there is something very beautiful and suggestive in the right posture for the observance of the Lord's supper; what is that? Coming up here, and kneeling as if there was something to worship? That is a relic of old Romanism that ought to be done away with by all Protestants. What is the proper way to observe this ordinance? Why, just sitting around the table on which the emblems are spread. Look at that remarkable picture of Leonardo da Vinci,—a picture which I have seen hanging up in a Romish church, as you may see it in many Romish churches. It represents Christ and all his disciples sitting at a table, and that is the right posture for us. How did they at first eat it? They reclined; they lay along, in the easiest possible posture that they could take, sustaining themselves upon the left arm, and so feeding, one with his head in his neighbour's bosom. Now, translating the Orientalism into the Western fashion, the nearest approach to that is to sit as much at your ease as ever you can; and the spiritual meaning of that posture is this. You are saved men and women; the life of God is in you; therefore, rest. "We who have believed do enter into rest." And whenever you want to feed on Christ, do not feed on him in a hurry; do not fidget; do not worry; do not stand with your loins girt, and with your staff in your hand, as the Israelites were to eat the Passover in Egypt. You are out of Egypt; you are past the wilderness; for we who have believed in Christ have entered Canaan, and are at rest.

VII. Once more, WE FEED UPON CHRIST AS WE SIT TOGETHER TO OBSERVE THIS ORDINANCE. A very blessed way of feeding upon Christ is pictured by our sitting together around this communion table. One person could not celebrate the Lord's supper, for a primary part of it is fellowship with others. "We being many are one bread, and one body." If you want rightly to feed on Christ, do not keep yourself to yourself, and do not try to keep Christ to yourself. No, brother, Christ Jesus is not Head over you alone; he is the Head of the whole body, which is his Church. I do believe that, sometimes, when you cannot pray

alone, you would be helped if you would associate others with you in your supplications. There is a way of feeding upon Christ by getting others to come in and feed too. Mind that; and let your communion with Jesus, while it should be alone full often, not be always alone, but lay hold upon your Saviour, and take him to your mother's house, and to the chamber of her that bare you, and there will he show you his great love. He may come to Peter or Magdalen alone; but he most of all delights, on the first day of the week, to stand in the midst of his assembled ones, and to say, not merely to any one of them, but to them all, "Peace be unto you." Live in holy love with all who love Christ, so shall you be helped to feed upon him, remembering that we are made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus our Lord.

VIII. The last point is this,—WE FEED NOT UPON CHRIST WITHOUT PRAISE. When we come to the close of the Lord's supper, we always do what our Lord Jesus did. After supper, they sang a hymn; so the right way to close the celebration of the supper is to sing a psalm of praise. And, dear friends, whenever you want to commune with Christ, take care that you praise as well as pray. Mingle thanksgiving with your supplications, for Jesus loves to hear the praises of his people. I am afraid we lose a great deal of communion with Christ because we do not give him more praise. I heard a brother say, the other day,—and, oh, how greatly did I enjoy his conversation when he said it!—"There are some times, when I am alone with God, when I cannot pray. I do not feel as if, just then, I wanted anything of him. Then," said he, "I always sing, or in some way or other praise God; and I find communion with God in praise to be as profitable to my soul as communion with him in prayer; and, oftentimes, before my praise is done, my prayer begins to spring up like a living well." Try that plan, brothers and sisters, for it may help you still more blessedly to feed upon Jesus Christ.

I wish that all my congregation knew the sweetness of feeding upon Christ. Every man feeds on something or other. You see one man getting his Sunday newspaper; how he will feed on that! Another goes to frivolous amusements, and he feeds on them. Another man feeds upon his business, and upon the thought of his many cares. But all that is poor food; it is only ashes and husks. If you did but possess true spiritual life, you would know the deep necessity there is of feeding upon Christ. But you do not possess that life, you say. No; then do you know what will become of the dead? What will become of the dead? And after death comes corruption. The old Jews, in the times of the kings, took the corrupting bodies of the dead out into the valley of Hinnom, and there they kindled great fires, that the corrupting corpses might be burnt. And something like that, only far worse, will be the lot of every one who is not quickened of the Spirit of God, and made to live with Christ. You will go to the place "where their worm dieth not;" that is the place of corruption; "and the fire is not quenched;" that is Tophet's flame. God save you from it! But there is no salvation from it except for those who have life through

believing in Jesus: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." God save you, dear friends, from that awful doom, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—282, 295, 942.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN VI. 41—65.

Verse 41. *The Jews then murmured at him,—*

That is, at the Christ,—

41, 42. *Because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?*

They did know his mother; but they made a mistake, which may have seemed a very slight one to them, when they said that they knew his father. Yet that is how nearly all great errors spring from some slight and apparently trivial addition to the truth. They did know Mary, but they did not know that Jehovah was the Father of the Christ.

43, 44. *Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Note the unflinching boldness of Christ. He did not say to these people, "Well, you have some cause for murmuring, and I will explain the matter to you." On the contrary, he faced them with the doctrine of sovereign grace, and told them that he did not expect them to understand him, for they could not do so except the Father, who had sent him, should draw their hearts towards him.

45. *It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*

So, in effect, he said to them, "You have not been taught of God; the Father has never drawn you, else would you have received me." So does the brave Champion thrust the naked sword of truth into their very souls.

46, 47. *Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*

Let me read those precious words again, catch at them, you timid and trembling ones: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me *hath*"—now, in present possession,—"everlasting life."

48, 49. *I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.*

He does not say, "Our fathers." He comes out, as it were, as much from the Jews as from the Gentile ungodly world, and he says, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead."

50, 51. *This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread—*

Bread that contains life within itself, and is therefore most potent to sustain a life like itself: "I am the living bread"—

51, 52. *Which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*

I wonder if they perceived that this declaration of Christ involved his death, for he did not speak of giving them his living body, but his "flesh." There are some who find their main comfort in the Incarnation of Christ; and, certainly, that is a very comforting truth; but, without the death of Christ, it affords no nourishment for the soul. Atonement, atonement,—there is the kernel of the whole matter. Christ must die, and then he can give us his flesh to eat.

53, 54. *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

His soul shall live; his spirit shall never die; and though his body shall die, the force of the eternal life within the man shall quicken even his mortal body into an immortality like that of his spirit.

55—60. *For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*

And a hard saying it really is until we are instructed of the Spirit of God to understand it. The Papist has made it into a gross and carnal saying, teaching men that they really, and actually, and corporeally, eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, which is horrible blasphemy, and nothing less. But they who are taught of God see the inward meaning of the truth peeping up from behind the letter, and know what it is to receive into their hearts, though not into their bodies,—into their thoughts, though not into their mouths,—the very body and blood of Christ.

61—63. *When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth;—*

The inward, spiritual meaning gives life to the Word, and life to us also: "It is the spirit that quickeneth;"—

63. *The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

They are not carnal; they are not gross they have in them an inner sense which is full of life and spirit.

64, 65. *But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*

"No man"—no, not even an apostle,—not the one who ate bread with Christ, and was his familiar friend,—not even he could come without being drawn by God. And he did not come to Christ; in the sense in which our Lord used the word, Judas never really came to him, but perished in his sin. The Father must draw us with cords divine, or else to the Son we shall never come.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AN ANTIDOTE TO SATAN'S DEVICES.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 30TH, 1900,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

On a Thursday Evening, during the winter of 1858.

"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made."—Genesis iii. 1.

OF course, we understand that this verse refers to "that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan." The Samaritan Version reads, instead of the word "serpent", "deceiver" or "liar." If this be not the genuine reading, it nevertheless certainly declares a truth. That old deceiver, of whom our Lord Jesus said to the Jews, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it," was "more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." God has been pleased to give to many beasts subtlety, —to some, subtlety and cunning combined with strength,—in order that they may be the more destructive to certain classes of animals whose numbers require to be kept under. To others, that are devoid of very much strength, he has been pleased to give instincts of most marvellous wisdom, for self-preservation and the destruction of their prey, and for the procuring of their food; but all the wise instincts and all the subtlety of the beasts of the field are far excelled by the subtlety of Satan. In fact, to go further, man has, perhaps, far more cunning than any mere creature, although animal instinct seems sometimes as if it did outride human reason; but Satan has more of cunning within him than any other creature that the Lord God hath made, man included.

Satan has abundant craft, and is able to overcome us, for several reasons. Methinks it would be a sufficient reason that Satan should be cunning because he is *malicious;* for malice is of all things the most productive of cunning. When a man is determined on revenge, it is strange how cunning he is to find out opportunities to vent his spite. Let a man have enmity against another, and let that enmity thoroughly possess his soul, and pour venom, as it were, into his very blood, and he will become exceedingly crafty in the means he uses to annoy and injure his adversary. Now, nobody can be more full of malice against man than Satan is, as he proveth

every day; and that malice sharpeneth his inherent wisdom, so that he becometh exceedingly subtle.

Besides, Satan is *an angel*, though a fallen one. We doubt not, from certain hints in Scripture, that he occupied a very high place in the hierarchy of angels before he fell; and we know that those mighty beings are endowed with vast intellectual powers, far surpassing any that has ever been given to beings of human mould. Therefore, we must not expect that a man, unaided from above, should ever be a match for an angel, especially an angel whose native intellect has been sharpened by a most spiteful malice against us.

Again, Satan may well be cunning now,—I may truthfully say, more cunning than he was in the days of Adam,—for *he has had long dealings with the human race.* This was his first occasion of dealing with mankind, when he tempted Eve; but he was even then "more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." Since then, he has exercised all his diabolical thought and mighty powers to annoy and ruin men. There is not a saint whom he has not beset, and not a sinner whom he has not misled. Together with his troops of evil spirits, he hath been continually exercising a terrible control over the sons of men; he is therefore well skilled in all the arts of temptation. Never anatomist so well understood the human body as Satan does the human soul. He has not been "tempted in all points," but he has tempted others in all points. He has tried to assail our manhood from the crown of our head to the sole of our foot; and he has explored every outwork of our nature, and even the most secret caverns of our souls. He has climbed into the citadel of our heart, and he has lived there; he has searched its inmost recesses, and dived into its profoundest depths. I suppose there is nothing of human nature that Satan cannot unravel; and though, doubtless, he is the biggest fool that ever hath existed, as time continually proveth, yet, beyond all doubt, he is the craftiest of fools, and I may add, that is no great paradox, for craft is always folly, and craftiness is but another shape of departure from wisdom.

And now, brethren, I shall for a few minutes first occupy your time by noticing *the craft and subtlety of Satan*, and the modes in which he attacks our souls; and, secondly, I shall give you a few words of admonition with regard to *the wisdom that we must exercise against him*, and the only means that we can use effectually to prevent his subtlety from being the instrument of our destruction.

I. Let us notice, in the first place, THE CRAFT AND SUBTLETY OF SATAN, as we have discovered it in our own experience.

And I may begin by observing, that Satan discovers his craft and subtlety by *the modes of his attack.* There is a man who is calm, and quiet, and at ease; Satan does not attack that man with unbelief or distrustfulness; he attacks him in a more vulnerable point than that; self-love, self-confidence, worldliness, these will be the weapons which Satan will use against him. There is another person who is noted for lowness of spirits and want of mental vigour; it is not probable that Satan will endeavour to puff him up with pride,

but examining him, and discovering where his weak point is, he will tempt him to doubt his calling, and endeavour to drive him to despair. There is another man of strong robust bodily health, having all his mental powers in full and vigorous exercise, enjoying the promises and delighting in the ways of God; possibly Satan will not attack him with unbelief, because he feels that he has armour for that particular point, but he will attack him with pride, or with some temptation to lust. He will most thoroughly and carefully examine us, and if he shall find us to be, like Achilles, vulnerable nowhere else but in our heel then he will shoot his arrows at our heel.

I believe that Satan has not often attacked a man in a place where he saw him to be strong; but he generally looks well for the weak point, the besetting sin. "There," says he, "there will I strike the blow;" and God help us in the hour of battle and in the time of conflict! We have need to say, "God help us!" for, indeed, unless the Lord should help us, this crafty foe might easily find enough joints in our armour, and soon might he send the deadly arrow into our souls, so that we should fall down wounded before him. And yet I have noticed, strangely enough, that Satan does sometimes tempt men with the very thing which you might suppose would never come upon them. What do you imagine was John Knox's last temptation upon his dying bed? Perhaps there never was a man who more fully understood the great doctrine that "by grace are ye saved," than John Knox did. He thundered it out from the pulpit; and if you had questioned him upon the subject, he would have declared it to you boldly and bravely, denying with all his might the Popish doctrine of salvation through human merit. But, will you believe it, that old enemy of souls attacked John Knox with self-righteousness when he lay a-dying? He came to him, and said, "How bravely you have served your Master, John! You have never quailed before the face of man; you have faced kings and princes, and yet you have never trembled; such a man as you are may walk into the kingdom of heaven on your own footing, and wear your own garment at the wedding of the Most High;" and sharp and terrible was the struggle which John Knox had with the enemy of souls over that temptation.

I can give you a similar instance from my own experience. I thought within myself that, of all the beings in the world, I was the most free from care. It had never exercised my thoughts a moment, I do think, to care for temporals; I had always had all I had needed, and I seemed to have been removed beyond the reach of anxiety about such matters; and yet, strange to say, but a little while ago, a most frightful temptation overtook me, casting me into worldliness of care and thought; and though I lay and groaned in agony, and wrestled with all my might against the temptation, it was long before I could overcome these distrustful thoughts with regard to God's providence, when, I must confess, there was not the slightest reason, as far as I could see, why such thoughts should break in upon me. For that reason, and for many more, I hate the devil worse and worse every day, and I have vowed, if it be

possible, by preaching the Word of God, to seek to shake the very pillars of his kingdom; and I think all God's servants will feel that their enmity against the arch-enemy of souls increaseth every day because of the malevolent and strange attacks that he is continually making upon us.

The modes of Satan's attack, then, as you will speedily learn, if you have not already done so, betray his subtlety. Ah! sons of men, while you are putting on your helmets, he is seeking to thrust his fiery sword into your heart; or while you are looking well to your breastplate, he is lifting up his battle-axe to split your skull; and while you are seeing to both helmet and breastplate, he is seeking to trip up your foot. He is always watching to see where you are not looking; he is always on the alert when you are slumbering. Take heed to yourselves, therefore; "put on the whole armour of God;" "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith;" and God help you to prevail over him!

A second thing in which Satan betrays his cunning is, *the weapons which he will often use against us.* Sometimes he will attack the child of God with the remembrance of a ribald song, or a licentious speech which he may have heard in the days of his carnal state; but far more frequently he will attack him with texts of Scripture. It is strange that it should be so, but it often is the case that, when he shoots his arrow against a Christian, he wings it with God's own Word. That seemed to be, according to the poet, the very poignancy of grief, that the eagle, when the arrow was drinking up his heart's blood, saw that the feather that winged it to his bosom had been plucked from his own breast; and the Christian will often have a somewhat similar experience. "Ah!" he will say, "here is a text that I love, taken from the Book that I prize, yet it is turned against me. A weapon out of God's own armoury is made to be the instrument of death against my soul." Have you not found it so, dear Christian friends? Have you not proved that, as Satan attacked Christ with an "It is written," so also has he attacked you? And have you not learned to be upon your guard against perversions of Sacred Scripture, and twistings of God's Word, lest they should lead you to destruction?

At other times, Satan will use the weapon of our own experience. "Ah!" the devil will say, "on such-and-such a day, you sinned in such-and-such a way; how can you be a child of God?" At another time, he will say, "You are self-righteous, therefore you cannot be an heir of heaven." Then, again, he will begin to rake up all the old stories that we have long forgotten of all our past unbeliefs, our past wanderings, and so forth, and throw these in our teeth. He will say, "What! *you,* you a Christian? A pretty Christian you must be!" Or, possibly he will begin to tempt you after some such sort as this: "The other day, you would not do such-and-such a thing in business: how much you lost by it! So-and-so is a Christian; he did it. Your neighbour, over the road, is he not a deacon of a church, and did not he do it? Why may not you do the

same? You would get on a great deal better if you would do it. So-and-so does it, and he gets on, and is just as much respected as you are; then why should not you act in the same way?" Thus, the devil will attack you with weapons taken from your own experience, or from the church of which you are a member. Ah! be careful, for Satan knows how to choose his weapons. He is not coming out against you, if you are great giants, with a sling and a stone; but he comes armed to the teeth to cut you down. If he knows that you are so guarded by a coat of mail that the edge of his sword shall be turned by your armour, then will he attack you with deadly poison; and if he knows that you cannot be destroyed by that means, seeing that you have an antidote at hand, then will he seek to take you in a trap; and if you be wary, so that you cannot be overtaken thus, then will he send fiery troubles upon you, or a crushing avalanche of woe, so that he may subdue you. The weapons of his warfare, always evil, and often spiritual and unseen, are mighty against such weak creatures as we.

Again, the craftiness of the devil is discovered in another thing, *in the agents he employs.* The devil does not do all his dirty work himself; he often employs others to do it for him. When Samson had to be overcome, and his Nazarite locks to be shorn away, Satan had a Delilah ready to tempt and lead him astray; he knew what was in Samson's heart, and where was his weakest place, and therefore he tempted him by means of the woman whom he loved. An old divine says, "There's many a man that has had his head broken by his own rib;" and certainly that is true. Satan has sometimes set a man's own wife to cast him down to destruction, or he has used some dear friend as the instrument to work his ruin. You remember how David lamented over this evil: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company." "Ah!" says the devil, "you did not think I was going to set an enemy to speak evil of you, did you? Why, that would not hurt you. I know better than that how to choose my agents; I shall choose a man who is a friend or an acquaintance; he will come close to you, and then stab you under the folds of your garments." If a minister is to be annoyed, Satan will choose a deacon to annoy him. He knows that he will not care so much about an attack from any other member of the church; so some deacon will lift up himself, and domineer over him, so that he shall have sleepless nights and anxious days. If it be a deacon that Satan wants to annoy, he will seek to set some member or brother-deacon against him; and if there is no other person that he cares for, it shall be his nearest and dearest friend who shall do the dastardly deed.

The devil is always ready to take in his hand the net into which the fish is most likely to go, and to spread the snare which is the most likely to catch the bird. I do not suspect, if you are a professor of long standing, that you will be tempted by a drunken

man; no, the devil will tempt you by a canting hypocrite. I do not imagine your enemy will come, and attack and slander you; it will be your friend. Satan knows how to use and to disguise all his agents. "Ah!" he says, "a wolf in sheep's clothing will be better for me than a wolf that looks like a wolf; and one in the church will play my game better, and accomplish it more readily, than one out of it." The choice of Satan's agents proves his craft and cleverness. It was a cunning thing that he should choose the serpent for the purpose of tempting Eve. Very likely Eve was fascinated by the appearance of the serpent; she probably admired its glossy hue, and we are led to believe that it was a far more noble creature then than it is now. Perhaps, then, it could erect itself upon its coils, and she was very likely pleased and delighted with it; it may have been the familiar creature with which she played—I doubt not it was—before the devil entered into it. You know how, often, the devil enters into each one of us. I know he has entered into me, many a time, when he has wanted a sharp word to be said against somebody. "Nobody can hurt that man, or grieve that man," says the devil, "so well as Mr. Spurgeon can; why, he loves him as his own soul. That's the man," says the devil; "to give the unkindest cut of all, and he shall give it." Then I am led, perhaps, to believe some wrong thing against some precious child of God, and afterwards to speak of it; and then I grieve to think that I should have been so foolish as to lend my heart and tongue to the devil. I can therefore warn each of you, and especially myself, and all those who have much love bestowed upon them, to take heed lest they become instruments of Satan in grieving the hearts of God's people, and casting down those who have trouble enough to cast them down, without having any from us.

And once again, Satan shows his cunning by *the times in which he attacks us.* I thought, when I lay sick, that if I could but get up from my bed again, and be made strong, I would give the devil a most terrible thrashing, because of the way he set upon me when I was sick. Coward! why did he not wait till I was well? But I always find that, if my spirits sink, and I am in a low condition of heart, Satan specially chooses that time to attack me with unbelief. Let him come upon us when the promise of God is fresh in our memory, and when we are enjoying a time of sweet outpouring of heart in prayer before God, and he will see how we will fight against him then. But, no; he knows that, then, we should have the strength to resist him; and, prevailing with God, we should be able to prevail over the devil also. He will therefore come upon us when there is a cloud between ourselves and our God; when the body is depressed, and the spirits are weak, then will he tempt us, and try to lead us to distrust God. At another time, he will tempt us to pride. Why does he not tempt us to pride when we are sick, and when we are depressed in spirit? "No," he says, "I cannot manage it then." He chooses the time when a man is well, when he is in full enjoyment of the promises, and enabled to serve his God with delight, and then he will tempt him to pride. It is the timing of his attacks, the right ordering of his assaults, that makes Satan ten times more

terrible an enemy than he would otherwise be, and that proves the depth of his craftiness. Verily, the old serpent is more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God hath made.

There is one thing about the powers of hell that has always amazed me. The Church of Christ is always quarrelling; but did you ever hear that the devil and his confederates quarrel? There is a vast host of those fallen spirits, but how marvellously unanimous they ever are! They are so united that, if at any special moment the great black prince of hell wishes to concentrate all the masses of his army at one particular point, it is done to the tick of the clock, and the temptation comes with its fullest force just when he sees it to be the most likely that he will prevail. Ah, if we had such unanimity as that in the Church of God, if we all moved at the guidance of the finger of Christ, if all the Church could, at this time, for instance, move in one great mass to the attack of a certain evil, now that the time has come for the attack upon it, how much more easily might we prevail! But, alas! Satan exceedeth us in subtlety, and the powers of hell far exceed us in unanimity. This, however, is a great point in Satan's subtlety, that he chooses always the times of his attacks so wisely.

And yet once more, and I will have done with this point. Satan's subtlety in another thing is very great, that is, *in his withdrawings.* When I first joined the Christian Church, I never could make out a saying which I heard from an old man, that there was no temptation so bad as not being tempted, nor did I understand then what Rutherford meant, when he said he liked a roaring devil a great deal better than a sleeping devil. I understand it now; and you, who are God's children, and who have been for some years in his ways, understand it also.

> **"More the treacherous calm I dread**
> **Than tempests rolling o'er my head."**

There is such a state of heart as this: you want to feel, but you do not feel. If you could but doubt, you would think it a very great attainment; yea, and even if you could know the blackness of despair, you would rather feel that than be as you are. "There!" you say, "I have no doubts about my eternal condition; somehow, I think I can say, though I could not exactly speak with assurance, for I fear it would be presumption, yet I do trust I can say that I am an heir of heaven. Yet that does not give me any joy. I can go about God's work; I do feel that I love it, yet I cannot feel it is God's work; I seem to have got into a round of duty, till I go on, on, on, like a blind horse that goes because it must go. I read the promise, but I see no particular sweetness in it; in fact, it does not seem as if I wanted any promise. And even threatenings do not frighten me; there is no terror in them to me. I hear God's Word; I am perhaps stirred by what the minister says, but I do not feel impressed by his earnestness as I should be. I feel that I could not live without prayer, and yet there is no unction in my soul. I dare not sin; I trust my life is outwardly blameless; still, what I have to mourn over is a leaden heart, a want of susceptibility

to spiritual delight or spiritual song, a dead calm in soul, like that dreadful calm of which Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' said,—

> "'The very deep did rot,
> Alas, that ever this should be!
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea.'"

Now, dear friend, do you know anything about your own state of heart just now? If so, that is the answer to the enigma, that not being tempted is worse than being tempted. Really, there have been times, in the past experience of my own soul, when I would have been obliged to the devil if he had come and stirred me up; I should have felt that God had employed him, against his wish, to do me lasting good, to wake me up to conflict. If the devil would but go into the Enchanted Ground, and attack the pilgrims there, what a fine thing it would be for them! But, you will notice, John Bunyan did not put him there, for there was no business for him there. It was in the Valley of Humiliation that there was plenty of work cut out for Satan; but in the Enchanted Ground the pilgrims were all slumbering, like men asleep on the top of the mast. They were drunken with wine, so that they could do nothing, and therefore the devil knew he was not needed there; he just left them to sleep on. Madame Bubble and drowsiness would do all his work. But it was into the Valley of Humiliation that he went, and there he had his stern struggle with poor Christian. Brethren, if you are passing through the land that is enchanted with drowsiness, indifference, and slumber, you will understand the craftiness of the devil in sometimes keeping out of the way.

II. And now, in the second place, let us very briefly enquire, WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THIS ENEMY? You and I feel that we must enter the kingdom of heaven, and we cannot enter it while we stand still. The City of Destruction is behind us, and Death is pursuing us; we must press towards heaven; but, in the way, there stands this "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." What shall we do? He has great subtlety; how shall we overcome him? Shall we seek to be as subtle as he is? Ah! that would be an idle task; indeed, it would be a sinful one. To seek to be crafty, like the devil, would be as wicked as it would be futile. What shall we do, then? Shall we attack him with wisdom? Alas! our wisdom is but folly. "Vain man would be wise;" but at his very best estate he is but "like a wild ass's colt." What, then, shall we do?

The only way to repel Satan's subtlety is *by acquiring true wisdom.* Again I repeat it, man hath none of that in himself. What then? Herein is true wisdom. If thou wouldst successfully wrestle with Satan, make the Holy Scriptures thy daily resort. Out of this sacred magazine continually draw thine armour and thine ammunition. Lay hold upon the glorious doctrines of God's Word; make them thy daily meat and drink. So shalt thou be strong to resist the devil, and thou shalt be joyful in discovering that he will flee from thee. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way," and how shall a Christian guard himself against the enemy? "By

taking heed thereto according to thy Word." Let us fight Satan always with an "It is written;" for no weapon will ever tell upon the arch-enemy so well as Holy Scripture will. Attempt to fight Satan with the wooden sword of reason, and he will easily overcome you; but use this Jerusalem blade of God's Word, by which he has been wounded many a time, and you will speedily overcome him.

But, above all, if we would successfully resist Satan, we must look not merely to revealed wisdom, but to *Incarnate Wisdom.* O beloved, here must be the chief place of resort for every tempted soul! We must flee to him "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He must teach us, he must guide us, he must be our All-in-all. We must keep close to him in communion. The sheep are never so safe from the wolf as when they are near the shepherd. We shall never be so secure from the arrows of Satan as when we have our head lying on the Saviour's bosom. Believer, walk according to his example; live daily in his fellowship; trust thou always in his blood; and in this way shalt thou be more than a conqueror even over the subtlety and craft of Satan himself. It must be a joy to the Christian to know that, in the long run, the craft of Satan shall all be disappointed, and all his evil designs against the saints shall prove of no effect. Are ye not looking forward, dearly-beloved, to the day when all your temptations shall be over, and when you shall land in heaven? And will you not then look down upon this arch-fiend with holy laughter and derision? I do believe that the saints, when they think of the attacks of Satan, shall "rejoice with joy unspeakable," and besides that, shall feel a contempt in their own souls for all the craft of hell when they see how it has been disappointed. What has the devil been doing these thousands of years? Has he not been the unwilling servant of God and of his Church? He has always been seeking to destroy the living tree; but when he has been trying to root it up, it has only been like a gardener digging with his spade, and loosening the earth to help the roots to spread themselves the more; and when he has been with his axe seeking to lop the Lord's trees, and to mar their beauty, what has he been, after all, but a pruning-knife in the hand of God, to take away the branches that do not bear any fruit, and to purge those that do bear some, that they may bring forth more fruit? Once upon a time, you know, the Church of Christ was like a little brook, —just a tiny streamlet,—and it was flowing along in a little narrow dell. Just a few saints were gathered together at Jerusalem, and the devil thought to himself; "Now I'll get a great stone, and stop this brook from running." So he goes and gets this great stone, and he dashes it down into the middle of the brook, thinking, of course, he should stop it from running any longer; but, instead of doing so, he scattered the drops all over the world, and each drop became the mother of a fresh fountain. You know what that stone was; it was persecution, and the saints were scattered by it; but then, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word," and so the Church was multiplied, and the devil was defeated. Satan, I tell thee to thy face, thou art the greatest fool

that ever breathed, and I will prove it to thee in the day when thou and I shall stand as enemies—sworn enemies, as we are this day,—at the great bar of God; and so, Christian, mayest thou say unto him whenever he attacks thee. Fear him not, but resist him steadfast in the faith, and thou shalt prevail.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

1 PETER I., AND V. 1—9.

Chapter i. Verses 1, 2. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

So may it be to all of you who are gathered here; grace first, and peace next; but may both grace and peace be multiplied unto you! Much grace, and much peace, may you have, brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus!

3—5. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Oh, what a blessed hope this is,—that, though we fall asleep, we shall surely wake again; and when we awaken, it will be in the likeness of the great Head of the family, and we ourselves shall be heirs of an inheritance in which there will be no sin and no corruption. That inheritance is kept for us, and we are kept for it; so the double keeping makes it doubly sure. Happy are the people to whom these verses apply.

6. *Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:*

It is possible, in Christian experience, for a man to rejoice greatly and yet to be in heaviness. No man can explain this paradox to his fellow, yet he understands it himself. "In heaviness through manifold trials," yet greatly rejoicing in the full conviction that they will soon be over, and that then we shall enter into unutterable joy. Be of good courage, then, you who are now depressed, you who are in heaviness; "lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." The fiery furnace is very hot; but the Son of man is in it with you; and, by his grace, you shall come out of the furnace before long.

7, 8. *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love;*

Ah! love can embrace him whom the eyes cannot see, and the hands cannot hold.

8—10. *In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:*

I have heard of some divines who will never read, and never study, because they have such an abundant measure of the Spirit of God that they

can talk any quantity of nonsense extemporaneously! But it was not so with the prophets. They had very much of the Spirit of God; yet, for all that, they were most diligent students. They "enquired and searched diligently,"—even those prophets "who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you." I have a very grave suspicion of that so-called "inspiration" which enables a man to preach without study. If there were such a thing, it would be a premium upon laziness; and I feel sure that the Spirit of God would never countenance such a thing as that.

11, 12. *Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;*

The prophets lived for us; they were inspired for us; and the benefits of their holy lives and gracious words are for us upon whom the ends of the earth have come.

12. *Which things the angels desire to look into.*

They, as well as the prophets, are deep students of the unsearchable mysteries of Christ.

13. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,—*

Pull yourself together; be not mentally and spiritually in dishabille; but be girt ready for holy running or sacred wrestling: "Gird up the loins of your mind,"—

13—17. *Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:*

In holy fear;—not in servile, slavish fear, but in a blessed state of sacred timidity and awe lest you should offend your God and Saviour.

18—25. *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*

Chapter v. Verse 1. *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*

Here again, as in the first chapter, Peter links the sufferings of Christ with his glory.

2—9. *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

END OF VOLUME XLVI.

Vol. XLVI. of *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* will (D.V.) be published by Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, early in the new year, at 7s. It contains fifty-two Sermons by C. H. SPURGEON, most of which were preached in the Tabernacle in 1881; but it also includes several discourses delivered in New Park Street Chapel in 1858, and one as far back as 1855. This combination of the early and later Sermons has been greatly appreciated by regular readers, who have noted that the doctrines proclaimed by the young man of twenty-four were identical with those taught by the matured preacher when he was double that age. There may have been some change in the form of expressing certain truths, but there was no difference in the truths that were taught at New Park Street Chapel, Exeter Hall, the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, or wherever else Mr. Spurgeon exercised his marvellous ministry.

It is a fact quite unique in the realm of literature that the weekly publication of one man's Sermons should have commenced early in the second half of one century, and should be continued in the next century, even though the preacher himself had for nine years been engaged in the higher service of the upper sanctuary. The number of unpublished discourses is, necessarily, diminishing year by year; but, happily, they can still be counted by hundreds. While they last, all lovers of C. H. Spurgeon, and of the gospel he delighted to declare, will increasingly prize them, and help to make them known to others. The last-published volume would make a most welcome New Year's gift to any clergyman, minister, or other Christian friend; while anyone possessing it, as well as its forty-five predecessors, would have a vast store of doctrinal and devotional reading matter of the most helpful character.

With the January number of "The Sword and the Trowel," which is now ready, Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster present, as a Memento of the Re-opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, a fine Photo Reproduction, on plate paper 20 by 15 inches, showing the interior of the Tabernacle at the Opening Services, with Mr. Sankey, together with Pastor Thomas Spurgeon and the Church Officers.

Among other items of interest in the January Magazine will be a notable early Sermon by C. H. SPURGEON; the first of a series of papers by Pastor Hugh D. Brown, M.A., of Dublin, entitled "Semper Idem" (God's Witness to His Own Word); an article by Pastor Thomas Spurgeon on "The Sword and Trowel in the New Century"; the first of a series of papers by Pastor J. E. Walton on "Bush Life in Tasmania;" and the beginning of H. T. S.'s "Diary of a Puritan Gentleman in the Reign of Queen Anne and George I." Price, with presentation plate, 3d. Post free, 5d.

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